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BRITISH DISARMAMENT POLICY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE 1932 - 1934

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the
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BRITISH DISARMAMENT POLICY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE DISARMAMENT
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines British policy towards disarmament, from the disarmament stipulations in the Peace Treaties to the end of the Disarmament Conference in 1934. The British attitude vis-à-vis France, Germany, and the League of Nations is emphasized, with consideration being given to the influence of public opinion and the armed forces, as well as to official policy. The first chapter discusses the attempts made at naval disarmament in 1921-22 at Washington, in 1927 at Geneva, and in 1930 at London. The League's efforts to solve the interrelated problems of disarmament, security, and arbitration are dealt with by an examination of schemes such as the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol.

The second chapter outlines the technical and political problems which the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference encountered in its seven sessions from 1926 to 1930. The remaining two chapters recount the proceedings of the Conference itself. Special attention is paid to the French demand for adequate security, the German insistence on equality of rights, and the British attempts to effect a reconciliation between the continental powers.

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The animals had met to disarm.
The lion, looking sideways at the eagle, said: "Wings must be abolished." The eagle, looking at the bull, declared: "Horns must be abolished." The bull, looking at the tiger, said: "Paws, and especially claws, must be abolished." The bear in his turn said: "All arms must be abolished; all that is necessary is a universal embrace."

Salvador de Madariaga,
25 February 1932,
Geneva.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS OF DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY: FROM VERSAILLES TO LONDON: 1919-1930

The related problems of disarmament and security in the interwar years arose out of the nature of the 1919 peace settlements made at Paris and the subsequent failure of the Allies to guarantee French security by ratifying the Treaty of Triple Guarantee. Numerous attempts were made to solve the two problems with varying degrees of success before the World Disarmament Conference met in 1932. The basic continuity of British policy makes an understanding of these attempts and of British attitudes imperative before a consideration of the 1932 Conference can be undertaken.

The first problem, that of disarmament, emanated from the terms of the Treaty of Versailles which called for the disarmament of Germany as a prelude to the disarmament of the Allied Powers. Part V of the Treaty specified the limitations to be placed on the armaments of Germany, the nation which the Allied Powers considered responsible for the colossal military expansion in the decades before the war.¹ The idea of disarming the former enemy power was advocated by Lloyd George and President Wilson, neither of whom was prepared to accept the more extreme demands of Marshal Foch and Georges Clemenceau for the dismemberment of Germany and the acceptance by that country of the Rhine as their permanent military frontier. The French had been the victims of

German aggression twice within living memory, and as a consequence were naturally anxious to prevent a reoccurrence. Clemenceau expressed this concern when he stated that:

He himself was not prepared to sign an invitation to Germany to prepare for another attack by land after an interval of three, ten or even forty years.²

Despite Foch's prophetic assertion that it was as impossible to permanently disarm Germany as it was to restrict England's output of coal, French advocates of measures which they believed would be more lasting and efficacious were not able to prevail in the face of Anglo-American opposition.³

Of equal importance for the future was the idea of the disarmament of the Allied Powers. This notion was vigourously put forward by Wilson in the fourth of his ill-fated Fourteen Points,⁴ and was supported as a general principle by the leading British statesmen at Paris. Lloyd George believed that rivalries and suspicions would not cease, and Germany would not observe the Peace Treaty, until the Allies had agreed to reduce their own forces. In a memorandum to Clemenceau dated 26 March 1919 the British Prime Minister stated:

To my mind it is idle to endeavour to impose a permanent limitation of armaments upon Germany unless we are prepared similarly to impose a limitation upon ourselves.⁵

He believed, moreover, that the envisioned League of Nations would be a sham and a mockery without general disarmament.⁶

The intentions of the Allies were made clear to the Germans in a note given to Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau by Clemenceau on 16 June 1919. In this document, the requirements for German disarmament are seen as "first steps towards that general reduction and limitation of

armaments which they [the Allies] seek to bring about as one of the most fruitful preventatives of war... ."7 This principle was further enunciated in the preamble to Part V of the Treaty of Versailles and in article eight, which states that "the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety... ."8

The ambiguity of these provisions ensured the complexity and diversity of their interpretation, for they can readily be construed as intentions, rather than as legal obligations.⁹ The Germans considered the Allied promises to be just as binding as the military restrictions which they themselves had to accept under Part V. On the other hand, Lord Robert Cecil, who was later to become the chief British delegate to the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, viewed the Allied obligation as conditional on the formulation of a general plan encompassing the disarmament of all the powers. Because no such plan was worked out, he later condemns the voluntary disarmament of the British in the 1920's.¹⁰ In any case, the Allies were only able to maintain the political equilibrium at Paris in 1919 by indefinitely postponing concrete measures calling for Allied disarmament.¹¹

It was undoubtedly difficult under the conditions of 1919 to arrive at a peace settlement that all the parties concerned would consider just. The need for fair terms which a responsible German government could carry out and which would ensure a lasting peace was recognized by Lloyd George, who realized that "injustice [and] arrogance, displayed in the hour of triumph, will never be forgotten or forgiven." Once "the deep impression made upon the human heart by four years of

unexampled slaughter"¹² had disappeared with the generation that had been involved in the war, peace would depend solely upon the merits and justice of the peace arrangements.

The British and French had different conceptions of the purpose and validity of the Treaty of Versailles, and this underlying factor was responsible for much of the friction which characterized their postwar negotiations involving the problems of security and disarmament. The French considered the Treaty to be a lever which could be manipulated in the realm of power politics, while the British were hesitant even to admit the settlement's justice and validity.¹³ Those whom A. J. P. Taylor labels "dissenters" campaigned against "the war-guilt lie," stressing the need to appease the wronged Germans who had as much right to an adequate degree of security as the overarmed French.¹⁴ Ramsay MacDonald, for example, believed that the mixing of passion and punishment in the Treaty had produced revenge, rather than equity.¹⁵ The sense of guilt which was thus engendered in many individuals in Britain was sufficient for them to ascribe Germany's economic woes and the intransigence of Adolf Hitler at a later date to the injustice of Versailles.¹⁶

It was realized shortly after the war that a nation with Germany's demographic strength and economic potential would not long accept a force of 100,000 men when her neighbours such as Czechoslovakia and Poland were permitted unlimited forces.¹⁷ Since Germany had been left territorially intact after the war, revision seemed inevitable: the question was whether it would be executed by peaceful or war-like methods.¹⁸ Lasting security, the British correctly

believed, could only be guaranteed by revision,¹⁹ since it was soon evident that many of the terms of the Peace Treaties would be ephemeral. Few would question Gerald B. Hurst's assertion in 1921 that "The terms adjusted at Versailles already seem to be hardly of less perishable substance than an eighteenth century treaty."²⁰

The problem of security in the interwar years centered around the French who envisaged with trepidation a time when they might be forced to stand alone face to face once again with a hostile Germany larger and stronger than themselves. This fear might not have become an obsession had American isolationism and British non-committal tendencies not prevailed in 1919. On 14 March of that year, Lloyd George and President Wilson informed Clemenceau that they could not agree to the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine, but made a joint offer to guarantee France against any unprovoked German aggression. The French government refused to back down, stressing in their reply of 17 March that the occupation was imperative for France, since she had only half of Germany's population, no natural frontier, and no Russian alliance to fall back on as before. Neither the League nor political safeguards would be sufficient.²¹ France, in short, could not be expected "to renounce a positive security for one based on expectations."²² The French, however, were forced to succumb: their hoped-for physical guarantee was exchanged for a political one. Unfortunately for subsequent Anglo-French and Franco-American relations, the American Senate refused to ratify what was intended to become the Treaty of Triple Guarantee, much to the chagrin of the hapless French who understandably felt betrayed. The American action allowed the British

to follow suit and bow out with at least a modicum of grace: they conveniently utilized the stipulation that the Treaty was valid only if collectively backed. Apologists for the British were also able to point to the fact that two of the Dominions, Canada and South Africa, failed to endorse the abortive scheme, making a united Commonwealth stand in favour of the Treaty impossible. What restraining power the British had or might have had over Paris was lost,²³ and the problem of security henceforth joined that of disarmament as a major unresolved issue in the interwar years.

With the failure of the Treaty of Triple Guarantee, France approached the question of security in three ways.²⁴ First of all, she successfully formulated alliances with Poland and the Little Entente countries of Eastern Europe -- Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania. Secondly, France maintained the largest land army in the world, backed up by a vast stockpile of materiel and countless reserve forces. The stress in article eight was not placed on the idea of Allied reduction of armaments, as it was by the British, but rather on the idea that any such reduction must be "consistent with national safety." Given the premise that adequate defences would have to be maintained against Germany, it was logical to the French that armament limitation would be proportional to the amount of assistance promised by other powers. In short, the peace would be kept by remaining strong.²⁵

The French, however, were to become the eventual victims of their own defensive, defeatist stance, a position best exemplified by the disastrous Maginot Line. Marshal Pétain, André Maginot, and the other dominant French military thinkers of the interwar years, univer-

salised the lessons learned at Verdun and at the other awesome battles of attrition: to them the theories of Captain B. H. Liddell Hart and Charles de Gaulle stressing mechanisation and mobility were nothing short of heresy.²⁶ They remained blind to the fact that "Modern weapons of offense are vastly stronger than modern weapons of defence."²⁷

Backed by what was a formidable military machine in the early twenties, and strengthened by alliances in Eastern Europe, France approached the matter of security in yet another way. Numerous offers were forwarded to Great Britain in an attempt to involve her in a continental alliance involving specific guarantees. The French hoped for a bilateral pact involving the cooperation of military staffs. A limited agreement was not considered adequate, since it was realised that Britain in her own interest would aid the Low Countries or France against unprovoked German aggression with or without a written guarantee.²⁸

Britain, however, found it difficult to reconcile the French military establishment with the aforementioned terms of the Peace Treaties requiring general disarmament. Since German promises were insufficient for the French, Britain was the only power which had the potential to persuade France to disarm.²⁹ However, this would involve what amounted to a voluntary unilateral reduction in her power, since Germany was already perforce disarmed, and Britain had cut her forces down to a bare minimum. The British thought that the peace would be better kept by cutting down on armaments than by remaining strong. It was feared that armaments might bring about a race similar to the one before 1914, which, it was believed, had been largely responsible for

the débâcle. It is ironic that France would later be blamed for overarming in the 1920's, while Great Britain would be blamed for the exact opposite in the 1930's.³⁰

Britain, moreover, scarcely felt that she could help France maintain the European status quo since she believed that the revision of the Paris settlement was both necessary and unavoidable. Apart from this consideration, British tradition militated against the acceptance of continental obligations, particularly in Eastern Europe. Alliances, it was felt, had brought about the hostile alignment of powers which had gone to war at such great cost in 1914. The fear that an Anglo-French rapprochement might lead to a détente between Russia and Germany, the two powers outside of the European comity, was heightened when the two isolated nations signed the Treaty of Rapallo on 16 April 1922. Armaments, and the threat of sanctions, might incite would-be aggressors, diminish the chances of disarmament, and create tensions which could jeopardize the peace.³¹ Moreover, with such widely scattered holdings, Britain feared that she might be saddled with the bulk of the responsibility for settling a dispute in some distant corner of the globe.³² If there were to be alliances, they would have to be multilateral agreements under the aegis of the League of Nations.

Specific commitments could only be made in areas where Great Britain's vital interests were at stake. There was no desire to relinquish the right to examine and act upon each contingency as it arose.³³ The Englishman, claimed Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1924 to 1929, trusts life but mistrusts thought, being content "to cross the bridge when he comes to it -- even at the

risk of having to ford the river on finding that there is no bridge at all." Chamberlain not only says that illogicality is an innate characteristic of the English, but seems to be proud of the fact: "After all, logic lost us the Thirteen Colonies."³⁴ Stanley Baldwin seems equally unconcerned when he admits that England has never had a logical government. All those he had been personally involved with, he adds with an approving touch of ingenuousness, "have been shot through and through with inconsistency and compromise."³⁵

This ethereal approach to foreign policy can readily be criticized for the indecisiveness, uncertainty, and vacillation which it leads to in practice, and undoubtedly exasperated the French policymakers of the twenties. British empiricism, as the above-mentioned attitude may benevolently be labelled, was not as haphazard as may appear at first glance. It must be remembered that in European power politics Britain was essentially a "producer" of security, in fact, the "pre-eminent producer," thanks to the Royal Navy, while France was a "consumer," largely as a result of her geographic vulnerability.³⁶ This was one of the most important factors which helped to mould Anglo-French relations after the First World War.

If the British ever had any positive thoughts about the efficacy of coercion in dealing with Germany, they were ended by the fiasco which resulted from the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr on 11 January 1923.³⁷ Poincaré's action not only exacerbated relations with Germany, but also led to the cessation of the negotiations for a security pact with Britain. Lord Robert Cecil's comments on Poincaré's "pound-of-flesh" attitude typified the disposition of many Britons. Cecil

referred to the occupation as one of the most foolhardy acts that any government had ever carried out.³⁸ In a letter to Poincare dated 21 February 1924, Ramsay MacDonald, then Prime Minister, spoke in uncompromising terms of the apparent "determination of France to ruin Germany and to dominate the continent without consideration of our reasonable interests and the future consequences to European settlement."³⁹ Henceforth the French realised that they could not successfully pursue an independent policy towards Germany. The alternating of ill-executed doses of coercion and conciliation neither permanently crippled nor appeased the ex-enemy power, but only generated more bitterness on all sides.⁴⁰

Problems which did not involve the basic conflicts amongst the continental powers and the intricacies of the Peace Treaties were easier to solve. The first relatively successful postwar proposal for a conference which would include the question of disarmament was, somewhat ironically, forwarded by the President of the most important non-League member, the United States. On 11 July 1921 President Harding suggested that the major naval powers meet in Washington on 11 November to discuss both the limitation of armaments and matters dealing with the Pacific and the Far East. The House of Commons unanimously accepted the invitation on 4 November, and the conference met as planned a week thereafter and remained in session until 6 February 1922.

The Conference resulted in the completion of nine separate treaties, the most important of which stemmed from the initiative of American Secretary of State, Charles E. Hughes. His far-reaching proposals led to a five power agreement setting maxima for capital ship

tonnage. The United States and Great Britain were each allowed 525,000 tons, Japan was permitted 315,000, while France and Italy were accorded 175,000 each, on the basis of a 5: 5: 3: 1.75: 1.75 ratio. Cruisers were not to displace more than 10,000 tons, or be armed with guns with calibres exceeding 8 inches. Great Britain, the United States, Japan, and later France also negotiated what was to become a Four Power Pact guaranteeing each other's Pacific holdings, and stipulating those which were not to be fortified.⁴¹ This Pact effectively ended the acrimonious debate over the fate of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by tacitly replacing the old arrangement with a new one which was more palatable to all the powers concerned.

The success of the Conference in dealing with capital ships can be partially explained by the attitude and motives of Great Britain, whose ready "concession" of parity to the United States and whose general eagerness to find common grounds helped to make the achievement of results possible. Above all, the Lloyd George Government hoped to save money through naval disarmament. The navy was by far the most costly of the three services, as was evident in the fact that the four "Super-Hoods" scheduled to be built in the fall of 1921 were to cost an astronomical £32,000,000. On 15 August a standing defence committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.) told the Cabinet that the primary goal of the forthcoming Conference should be the achievement of as great a saving on armaments as possible. The C.I.D. and the Admiralty subsequently agreed that the limitation of capital ships was the most feasible method of accomplishing this.⁴² Furthermore, it was realised that the existing naval race was being

lost and would continue to be lost by Great Britain. As a result of the Ten Year Rule,⁴³ she had not built any battleships since the war, although countless pre-war vessels had ended up on the scrap pile. Meantime, the United States, in its bid for naval primacy, had built fifteen, while Japan had made plans for eight more capital ships by 1928. Britain would inevitably be outstripped in any arms competition with the United States, thanks to the greater financial and industrial resources of the latter. Hence it appeared diplomatically sound for the British to accept parity, while it still seemed like a concession, before American ship-building plans reached fruition. Money would be saved, the relatively favourable existing ratio would be crystallised, and Anglo-American relations would be preserved on a sound footing. Britain, in fact, was actually only adjusting to the realities of her diminished postwar economic power.⁴⁴ Therefore the immediate acceptance of Hughes' proposed ratios by A. J. Balfour and Admiral Earl Beatty of the British Empire Delegation went a long way towards ensuring the favourable outcome of the negotiations on the limitation of capital ships. This limitation was particularly significant in view of the fact that battleships and battlecruisers were still considered by both British and American naval authorities as the backbone of sea power.⁴⁵ The ultimate irony lies in the fact that with the development of the submarine and the aeroplane they were on the point of becoming obsolescent.

It is instructive to consider why, on the other hand, the land and air disarmament which was studied by a sub-committee at Washington, failed completely. First of all, the political relations between the

powers involved militated against a settlement. France had been denied the security which she desired with the failure of the Treaty of Triple Guarantee, and by the time of the Conference would not accept any land or air limitation unless it was accompanied by an Anglo-American military guarantee. Britain, for her part, had decided in a C.I.D. meeting of 24 October that her meagre army could not safely be reduced any further. Secondly, it became evident in the sub-committee that disarmament per se involved certain technical problems which no measure of agreement could surmount. For example, since civil aeroplanes could easily be converted into warplanes, the committee concluded that to limit aircraft was "to shut the door on progress" and "limit the science of aeronautics."⁴⁶ This, it should be noted, was a problem which the Preparatory Commission later tried to grapple with, but which it likewise was not able to solve.

Even naval disarmament itself was far from being an unqualified success. A competition in unrestricted categories developed, particularly in cruisers as a result of the fact that the powers began to build up to the 10,000 ton maximum which had been laid down. Thus many of the problems and difficulties of the disarmament problem were revealed by the Washington Conference. Success seemed to be dependent upon the willingness of the powers to compromise, upon suitable political conditions, and upon an absence of insuperable technical problems. Agreement was only possible when each nation felt as though it was gaining relatively more either financially, politically, or militarily than it was giving up. In 1921-22 these conditions were met for capital ships, thus making a treaty possible, but they could not be

fulfilled for lesser vessels or for land or air armaments.

The League of Nations, meanwhile, had taken strides towards fulfilling the disarmament provisions in the Covenant. Included in the original structure of the League was the Permanent Advisory Commission consisting of military experts, set up to deal with the armaments problem. The composition of this group ensured its failure, for as Salvador de Madariaga points out:

It was as foolish to expect a disarmament convention from such a commission as a declaration of atheism from a commission of clergymen⁴⁷

Military chiefs who are paid to ensure the victory of their nation in the event of war can scarcely be expected to voluntarily reduce their nation's armed strength. In 1920, therefore, the First Assembly's recommendation for an additional body composed partially of civilians led to the formation of the so-called Temporary Mixed Commission for the Reduction of Armaments (T.M.C.). The British representatives on this Commission took the initiative and advanced a number of plans. Lord Esher forwarded a scheme which even included specific numerical maxima for the arms of the various powers. Europeans, however, were far from ready to transform the idealism of the Covenant into reality. The plan was given a "first-class funeral," and Lord Esher gave up his post on the Commission.⁴⁸

The T.M.C.'s first significant decision was reached in the summer of 1922, and was to effect all subsequent transactions relating to disarmament. Arms limitation, claimed Lord Robert Cecil and the other members of the Commission, must be carried out by all countries to be truly effective and would have to be backed by adequate guarantees of security. This general principle emphasizing the interdependence of

disarmament and security was accepted by the Third Assembly as Resolution XIV in the September session of that year.

It was a full year later that the T.M.C. laid a proposal based on the above principle before the Fourth Assembly. The document, dubbed the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, was largely an amalgamation of the drafts worked out by Lord Cecil and Colonel Requin.⁴⁹ The Treaty was based on the assumption that a nation would only disarm once security had been assured. This would be made possible by greatly increasing the authority of the League Council. In the event of aggression, which was declaimed as an international crime, the Council was to name within four days the responsible party, and mobilize, if necessary, armed resistance against the offender. The Council not only decided which countries were to contribute to the military effort, but also what resources were to be employed by them. The Council also appointed a High Commander. The one escape from the dictates of the Council was provided by a clause which stated that aid would only have to be given to countries within one's continent.

There was considerable dissension in the ranks of the Assembly over the draft Treaty, so it was decided that it should be submitted to all governments both within the League and outside of it for consideration. The French and Italians favoured the Treaty, while the two most important peripheral powers, the United States and Russia, opposed it. The scheme's fate ultimately rested with the British, who might not have been able to ensure its success, but could undoubtedly ensure its failure.

Ramsay MacDonald's letter of 5 July 1924 to the League's

Secretary-General did just this. The Labour Prime Minister began his rejection of the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance by quite legitimately contending that there was no point in adopting a scheme which was likely to fail in practice because of unforeseen defects. He then conveniently spread the responsibility for rejection by affirming the validity of certain of the criticisms which other countries had included in their replies. MacDonald maintained that four days to decide on the aggressor in a dispute was too short a time for a political group like the Council to reach such a difficult verdict, yet too long a time to wait to take effective action against the condemned party. The difficulty of separate nations unanimously agreeing to one plan and one commander was amply shown in World War I, and even if agreement was reached, decisions would have to be implemented. Moreover, a nation called upon to give aid in a given conflict might find that its own political situation or the state of its public opinion militated against its cooperation. Hence MacDonald asserted that "the guarantee afforded by the draft treaty is so precarious that no responsible Government will feel justified in consenting to any material reduction of its armaments in return."⁵⁰

The most significant blow dealt in the letter befell the League Council. MacDonald said that it was an advisory rather than an executive body, and as such should not be allowed to mobilize armed forces against any state. He pointed out that the terminology of the Covenant illustrated this conception of the Council's role. Article ten speaks of the Council "advising" action, while article sixteen uses the verb "recommend." In comparison, article five of the draft Treaty more

affirmatively refers to "deciding." In view of the fact that many thought that the original obligations contained in the Covenant were too substantial, it would be difficult for the Council to muster up the strong sense of common responsibility which the draft Treaty assumed.⁵¹

MacDonald, as the leader of a minority government whose very existence depended on the whims of the Liberals, had to tread warily. He could scarcely accept a Treaty which might call for the employment of the Royal Navy in some hazardous venture, such as a blockade which could antagonize the United States. Public opinion would not entertain such a possibility.⁵² It is interesting to note the reasons which the principal British framer and promoter of the draft Treaty, Lord Cecil, cites for its rejection. The Labour Prime Minister, says Cecil, supported the theory behind the League, but never liked the organization itself in practice. MacDonald preferred the old diplomacy, "the conception that a few very eminent personages sitting in secrecy should settle the affairs of Europe."⁵³ Coupled with this, according to Cecil, was Balfour's anachronistic anti-commitment stance which in practice amounted to a refusal to define policy for given situations in advance. If such a position had not been maintained, the draft Treaty might have come into operation, and the rape of Czechoslovakia and the invasion of Poland in the late thirties might not have taken place.⁵⁴

In any case, the British should not be burdened with the entire blame for the failure of the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Perhaps Ramsay MacDonald did no more than administer the coup de ^{gr}âce to an already moribund scheme.

The publication of the Prime Minister's letter of 5 July 1924 placed Labour, the party that had promised to strengthen the League of Nations, in a perilous position. A replacement would have to be found for the jettisoned draft Treaty. Fortunately for MacDonald, the conciliatory Herriot replaced the recalcitrant Poincaré after the general election of May 1924. The new Premier and MacDonald were able to agree at the July reparations conference in London that arbitration, viewed as a method of solving financial problems, might also provide a way out of the security-disarmament impasse.

This idea was the keystone of a speech which Ramsay MacDonald delivered to the Fifth Assembly on 4 September 1924.⁵⁵ Arbitration, which would allow courts to allocate responsibility for aggression, was the most certain way to peace, ensuring that justice would reign over passion. A system of arbitration was essentially a warning system which would "charm" dark clouds out of existence, not by military means, but rather by rational judicial procedures. Along with these plans for dealing with disputes, MacDonald envisioned a Disarmament Conference which he claimed would have to be held in Europe and include all the nations of the world, not just League members. Adequate preparations would be necessary before such a Conference met -- Germany should be in the League, and the beginnings of an international arbitration system should be in existence.

MacDonald's proposals assumed the inseparability of disarmament, security, and arbitration, thus broadening the base established by the above-mentioned Resolution XIV. The British Prime Minister's speech led to the formulation of the so-called Geneva Protocol for the Pacific

Settlement of International Disputes. The purpose of the Protocol was to realize article eight of the Covenant and fill in any fissures that the framers had left open in 1919 which might benefit an aggressor. The name Protocol was used as it expressed the continuity between it and the Covenant.⁵⁶

The Geneva Protocol was a mutual non-aggression, mutual assistance pact which tried to overcome the inflexibility of the draft Treaty.⁵⁷ Aid was not conditional on a state's disarmament, as it was with the draft Treaty, and the unanimity of the Council was not mandatory in all instances. Complex arrangements for every conceivable type of quarrel were laid down. Legal disputes posed little problem, for they could be handled by the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague. Non-legal disputes, however, were to be considered first by a Committee of Arbitrators agreed upon by the parties involved, and then in turn by various authorities if a deadlock could not be resolved.⁵⁸ Any party failing to follow the arbitrator's decision would be considered an aggressor, subject to punishment through collective sanctions. Greater latitude was granted in regard to contributions than had been the case with the stillborn 1923 Treaty.

The League Council was to draw up a disarmament plan which was to be ready no later than three months before 16 June 1925, the date set for the proposed Disarmament Conference. The Protocol was not to come into force until the Conference had drawn up a plan for disarmament. In view of the subsequent innumerable Conference postponements and the tardiness of the Preparatory Commission, such sanguine hopes

were a manifestation of the naïve attitude which many statesmen had towards the disarmament problem.

Despite the relative flexibility of the Geneva Protocol, the British dispatched Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain to Geneva where he sealed the Protocol's fate in a speech on 12 March 1925. This speech must have appeared somewhat incongruous and even impudent to delegates who had heard MacDonald's high-minded phrases the fall before. The framers of the Covenant, declared Chamberlain, had not supported compulsory arbitration, the adoption of which would merely create fresh opportunities for defying the League's decisions and for resorting to coercion. This rather casuistic approach was followed up by a questioning of the fundamental effectiveness of the League. The non-inclusion of the United States in the League, said the Foreign Secretary over half a decade after the fact, had not been anticipated, making certain schemes difficult, such as those involving the imposition of economic sanctions. Moreover, there was no point in accepting "generalities in dogmas of inflexible rigidity, designed to control the actions of the League in all circumstances and for all time," when the Covenant, if kept, would afford sufficient protection. If the cooperative spirit of the Covenant was not to be corrupted, there must not be an overindulgence in unhealthy thoughts concerning war:

Such catastrophes belong to the pathology of international life, not to its normal condition. It is not wholesome for the ordinary man to be always brooding over the possibility of some severe surgical operation; nor is it wise for societies to pursue a similar course.⁵⁹

Austen Chamberlain, to be sure, had a mentality better suited to the ethereal haze and sense of camaraderie which was later much in evidence at Locarno.

In view of the attitude which Great Britain had taken towards the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance in particular and commitments in general, it was not surprising that the recently elected Conservative Government did not favour the Geneva Protocol. The new Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, according to his official biographer G. M. Young, was more interested in England's unemployment problem than in foreign policy. Baldwin found it difficult to empathize with foreigners, who either made him peevish or put him to sleep.⁶⁰ There is little doubt, however, that the Protocol would still have been abandoned, with perhaps more embarrassment, had Labour remained in power.

The Geneva Protocol might have materialized if the British attitude had been different. France favoured the plan, and Italy, Japan and the smaller powers would probably have followed a British move towards acceptance. The whole of recent British history, however, worked against such a course being taken. As Alfred Zimmern aptly comments on the Protocol:

The almost Byzantine subtlety which characterized its definitions and dispositions made it as un-English a composition as could well have been conceived.⁶¹

The first tangible success in grappling with the problem of security came as a result of German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann's proposal which first reached London on 20 January 1925 for an agreement upholding the status quo in western Europe by the countries interested in the Rhineland and its demilitarization. The Germans realized that

the chances of another Ruhr crisis could only be minimized by joining the Comity of Nations, even though such a move would necessitate a voluntary renunciation of certain revisionist possibilities.⁶²

Austen Chamberlain hinted at the end of his 12 March 1925 speech to the League Assembly that British accession to such an agreement was feasible. The Covenant could best be supplemented, said Chamberlain, by bringing together the parties concerned and working out arrangements to satisfy their needs.⁶³ His suggestion was reminiscent of the relatively successful Washington Conference of 1922 which brought together the nations interested in the Far East and allowed them to work out a regional pact.

Stresemann's ideas were accepted both by the British and the French and became the corner-stone of the Locarno Pacts signed on 1 December 1925.⁶⁴ The immutability of the situation on the Rhine, including the demilitarized zone and Alsace-Lorraine was guaranteed, while Germany agreed that change in the east would not be wrought by force. This stipulation protected Poland, while not ruling out peaceful German revision in the east. The main treaty was backed by Great Britain and Italy, with breaches to be decided upon by the League Council. The one exception to this rule was in the case of "flagrant violation," when action would be taken before the Council met if the guarantors concurred as to the guilty party. Germany concluded arbitration treaties with all her neighbours, and was to join the League to bring the Pacts into force. By becoming part of the League, Germany would be tacitly accepting the 1919 Treaty settlement as a whole.⁶⁵

In many ways, the results of the Conference were ideal for the British. Stresemann's offer was just what was needed after the British

had rejected two schemes -- the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol -- which they had been instrumental in drawing up in the first place. Negotiations since the abortive Treaty of Triple Guarantee had pointed to the need for some sort of détente with France, especially after the Ruhr crisis. The Locarno Pacts underwrote French security without forcing the British to become involved in day to day continental politics. Hopefully, Locarno would give the French the satisfaction which they had demanded in 1919 and subsequently been denied.

Austen Chamberlain realised that total detachment from the continent was impossible. He felt that a precise explanation of Britain's position would serve a deterrent value, since it was at least arguable that the First World War could have been averted had Britain made her position clear in advance. Britain's safety, in short, lay in furthering the cause of peace while it was possible to do so, rather than waiting for war to break out. France and Germany could be brought closer together, and a sense of security could be achieved which would help attempts at disarmament. With the advent of Locarno, Germany was in fact voluntarily accepting what she had previously acceded to under the compulsion of the Peace Settlement.⁶⁶ The British, it seemed, were gaining far more than they were sacrificing.

Public opinion and statesmen in general viewed Locarno as "a change infinitely for the better," and even as "the beginning of a new era."⁶⁷ Germany had been admitted to a conference as an equal for the first time since the war, such that the European

Comity appeared to have become a viable reality. Locarno coincided with relative economic prosperity, an international mood of optimism, and Stresemann's "policy of fulfillment." International tensions were eased by the personal friendships among Chamberlain, Briand, and Stresemann, Taylor's "good German." The presence of leading statesmen at Geneva, following the precedent set by MacDonald and Herriot, raised the prestige of the League, and seemed to add substance to Chamberlain's assertion that Locarno marked the true end of the Great War. In retrospect, however, the 'Age of Locarno' appears to be little more than the high point of self-deception in the years between the wars.

After at least apparent success in resolving the security dilemma, attention was focused once again on the problem of naval disarmament. The opportunity for extending the Washington ratios to all classes of vessels arose when President Coolidge suggested that a Naval Conference be held in Geneva in the summer of 1927. Coolidge was disillusioned with the progress of the Preparatory Commission and the competition in cruisers, and hoped that an Anglo-American agreement establishing parity for secondary craft would be the first step towards a general settlement amongst the powers. Britain and Japan accepted the invitation, while the two major continental naval powers, France and Italy, refused to settle their differences and only sent observers. Their absence made it difficult for the British to assess their overall needs.

The Conference met on 20 June 1927 and proved to be a complete failure. The First Lord of the Admiralty, W. C. Bridgeman, maintained

that Britain needed a minimum of seventy small cruisers for patrol work in peacetime, and for convoys and blockades in the event of hostilities. Although it was more a matter of satisfying Britain's essential needs than a desire to deny the Americans parity at this level, Bridgeman calculated on the basis of the length of trade routes to be safeguarded that the United States required forty-seven cruisers, and the Japanese twenty-one.⁶⁸ The British hoped, moreover, that limitation would be carried out according to categories, thus preventing any power from spending an undue proportion of its naval money on one class of vessel -- particularly 10,000 ton cruisers and submarines.

The Americans did insist on parity, in keeping with the decision made by the Navy's General Board on 21 April that "Equity with Great Britain is the sole base on which a just treaty can be imposed."⁶⁹ Seventy, however, was considered much too high a figure at which to establish equality, and would never be accepted by the public or by Congress. Admiral H. P. Jones, chief naval adviser to the American delegation, proposed a total cruiser tonnage of 400,000, stating that his country would build twenty-five 10,000 ton vessels with eight inch guns within this limit, utilizing the remaining tonnage for craft which were lighter but which were equipped with similar weaponry. Bridgeman, and even Lord Robert Cecil, an eager advocate of disarmament agreements,⁷⁰ refused to contemplate such terms.⁷¹ Both sides remained intransigent. The Americans did not fully comprehend the needs of the Empire, and could not accept the rationality of the figure seventy when the British had never possessed more than

fifty-five cruisers. The United States wanted large cruisers for herself, however, in order to match Japan and have at her disposal long-range ships which could compensate for a lack of bases. The total tonnage method of limitation would allow her to build such vessels according to her particular needs.

There are a number of significant and revealing reasons why no agreement of any sort was reached. First of all, Britain and the United States had differing strategical requirements. Thanks to inadequate preparation and a lack of communication, these two nations failed to understand fully the needs of each other. Communication was hindered by the American absence from the League, and also by the less than ideal relationship between the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Esme Howard, and Frank B. Kellogg, the Secretary of State.

Secondly, naval advisers managed to gain ascendancy over their political chiefs.⁷² For example, Hugh Gibson, the head of the American team, was unable to adequately control Admiral Jones, whose excessive demands alienated the British. Jones and the other advocates of a "navy second to none" were reinforced by the anti-British tenor of the press during the negotiations. The Hearst chain in particular was becoming so hostile that Bridgeman publicly proclaimed on 14 July that "the atmosphere was being vitiated by gross misrepresentations of the British case in certain quarters...".⁷³ Discord was also conscientiously fostered by William B. Shearer who was hired by the steel and ship-building industries to try to scuttle the whole Conference.

Apart from these considerations, it must be remembered that all the proposals forwarded involved increases in strength, thus ensuring

that even if the powers cooperated the idea of disarmament would not be effected.⁷⁴ A "disarmament" conference which places ceilings above existing levels undermines its own raison d'être.

The situation was exasperated by what is known as the Anglo-French Compromise of August 1928. The French agreed to concede to the British on auxiliary vessels, in return for concessions with regard to the non-inclusion of French trained reserves in the number of effectives counted for land disarmament purposes. The Compromise was greeted by almost universal condemnation. First of all, the latter portion of the agreement was tacitly omitted in the press release, a fact which caused embarrassment when the whole text of the Compromise leaked out. The entire arrangement smacked of secrecy and the desire to present a fait accompli to the world. Secondly, American opinion in particular viewed the terms of the Compromise as little more than a repetition of what had been rejected the year before at Geneva. The British public, on the other hand, feared alienating the United States, and looked askance at the possible obligations to France. Suspicions were scarcely alleviated on either side of the Atlantic when Lord Cushenden declared in singularly undiplomatic fashion on 25 October that "there was no new entente with France, for the old one had never been dissolved."⁷⁵

The Americans resented the Compromise partly because its spirit seemed to be antithetical to the Pact of Paris which Frank B. Kellogg was instrumental in formulating. This Pact, usually referred to as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, was signed in Paris on 27 August 1928, earnestly condemning "recourse to war for the solution of international contro-

versies," renouncing it as "an instrument of national policy."⁷⁶ The British accepted the treaty on the "understanding" that it did not limit their freedom to protect certain vital portions of the Empire from attack.⁷⁷ This Pact theoretically drew Britain and the United States and most of the other nations of the world closer together in the prevention of war, but on a practical level its lack of even nominal sanctions made it virtually meaningless.

The question of naval disarmament still loomed as one of the major issues remaining to be settled. The Americans began to think that they would have to out-build the British before they would accept parity in auxiliary vessels. On 13 February 1929 Coolidge signed a naval bill authorising the largest American programme since the war. Fifteen large cruisers and one aircraft carrier were to be built. It appeared as though the President was leading his country back into international affairs "under the emblem of the flaming sword."⁷⁸

It thus seemed opportune for the British to accept the idea of a five power Naval Conference when it was suggested by Herbert Hoover, who entered the White House in March 1929. The delegates assembled in London in January 1930, and met with at least partial success. The most significant outcome of the London Naval Conference was the extension of the Washington ratios to non-capital ships. Although France and Italy did not sign this accord, the other three powers were able to concur thanks to mutual concessions. The United States, contrary to the advice of its Naval Board, lowered its demand for cruisers with eight inch guns from twenty-four to eighteen, Japan accepted sixty per cent of this number rather than insist on the pre-Conference seventy per cent,

and Britain pared her seventy cruiser figure down to fifty. However, she did insist on the inclusion of a "safeguarding" clause to allow for further building in the event of expanded programmes by non-signatory states such as France and Italy. Further provisions were made for the scrapping of five battleships by Great Britain, three by the United States, and one by Japan, and a capital ship building "holiday" was declared to be in effect until 1936.⁷⁹

The personnel involved helped to make agreement possible. Ramsay MacDonald, who had come to power in June 1929, overrode the Admiralty's protests to the decreased maximum for cruisers, writing to Stimson on 25 July that "political and not service hands" should be in full charge at the Conference. The American naval advisers who went to London, Admirals Pratt and Moffett, turned out to be much more liberal than Admiral Jones had been in 1927. The very fact that after the Conference both sides claimed that they had ceded the most and had endangered themselves as a result, seems to indicate that the compromises reached were reasonably equitable.⁸⁰ Critics in Britain condemned the capitulation on cruisers, felt to be indispensable to the nation's safety. Lord Robert Vansittart perhaps expresses the dismay over the voluntary British reduction most succinctly when he points out in The Mist Procession that "In diplomacy, you can 'solve' anything by giving away."⁸¹

The eleven years from 1919 to 1930 were not easy ones for Great Britain in her external relations. Moderate success had been achieved in naval disarmament, but only at the cost of alienating those who said that a powerful navy was essential for Britain and the Empire's

survival. The problem of security had been faced at Locarno, but France was still far from appeased. Most important of all, by 1930 Germany was becoming increasingly vociferous in her demand for equal rights and treatment in the international community. These unsolved problems manifested themselves clearly in the proceedings of the Preparatory Commission of the Disarmament Conference, to which we must now turn.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹See Part V, clause II, of the note handed by Clemenceau on behalf of the Allied and Associated Powers to Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau on 16 June 1919. Reproduced in John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Disarmament Deadlock, (London, 1934), p. 3.

²Quoted in R. A. Chaput, Disarmament in British Foreign Policy, (London, 1935), p. 264.

³Ibid., pp. 262-64.

⁴Wilson's fourth point ran as follows: "Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety." Quoted in B. H. Williams, The United States and Disarmament, (New York, 1931), p. 238.

⁵Cmd. 2169, p. 80.

⁶Lloyd George and Balfour make this point in a similar fashion. Cf. Cmd. 2169, p. 80, and Balfour's quotation in Chaput, p. 253.

⁷Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, p. 3.

⁸F. L. Israel, ed., Major Peace Treaties of Modern History: 1648-1967, (New York, 1967), Vol. II, p. 1277.

⁹Alfred Zimmern, The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, (London, 1936), p. 333; W. M. Jordan, Great Britain, France and the German Problem, (London, 1943), p. 149. Both authors support the idea that the sections of article eight and Part V of the Peace Treaties referring to general disarmament were not legally binding on the Allied Powers.

¹⁰Viscount Cecil, A Great Experiment, (London, 1941), p. 79.

¹¹Chaput, pp. 271-72.

¹²Cmd. 2169, p. 77.

¹³F. S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain among the Great Powers: 1916-1939, (London, 1966), p. 223.

¹⁴A. J. P. Taylor, The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy: 1792-1939, (Bloomington, Ind., 1958), pp. 174, 179-80.

¹⁵Lord Elton, The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald: 1866-1919, (London, 1939), pp. 355-56.

¹⁶Taylor, The Trouble Makers, p. 174, and The Origins of the Second World War, (Greenwich, Conn., 1966), pp. 50-51. Taylor discounts the theory that Germany was ruined by the financial provisions of Versailles: Germany, says Taylor, was ruined by her own domestic policy.

¹⁷"Problems of Europe: The Paris Conference and After," Round Table, XXXVIII (March, 1920), p. 301.

¹⁸Taylor, Second World War, p. 54.

¹⁹Northedge, p. 230.

²⁰"The World's Desire for Peace," Nineteenth Century and After, XC (December, 1921), p. 932.

²¹Cmd. 2169, pp. 69-73.

²²Ibid., p. 75.

²³Seton-Watson, p. 82.

²⁴Northedge, p. 224.

²⁵Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between Two Wars: Conflicting Strategies of Peace since Versailles, (New York, 1940), pp. 5, 82.

²⁶For the conclusions which the French drew from the stalemate on the western front in World War I, see Alistair Horne, The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1964), chapter xxvii. De Gaulle's theories on modern warfare, first published in 1934, were unfortunately followed by the Germans, and ignored by the French. See Charles de Gaulle, The Army of the Future, (Philadelphia, 1941).

²⁷This quotation is from President Roosevelt's speech of 16 May 1933. John W. Wheeler-Bennett, ed., Documents on International Affairs, (London, 1928-61), 1933, p. 195. Henceforth referred to as D.I.A.

²⁸Northedge, p. 229; Wolfers, pp. 79-80.

²⁹"Problems of Europe," p. 303.

³⁰Wolfers, pp. 70, 370-72.

³¹A. J. Toynbee, ed., Survey of International Affairs, (London, 1920-61), 1930, p. 15. Henceforth referred to as Survey. Wolfers, p. 378; C. L. Mowat, Britain between the Wars: 1918-1940, (London, 1956), p. 476.

³²Seton-Watson, p. 87.

³³Zimmern, p. 339.

³⁴Austen Chamberlain, "The Permanent Bases of British Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, IX (July, 1931), p. 537.

³⁵Stanley Baldwin, The Falconer Lectures, (Toronto, 1939), p.34.

³⁶Zimmern, p. 328.

³⁷Taylor, Second World War, pp. 53-55.

³⁸Cecil, pp. 142-43.

³⁹Quoted in G. M. Young, Stanley Baldwin, (London, 1952), p.76.

⁴⁰See Wolfers, pp. 84-94. The author discusses the occupation of the Ruhr and the withdrawal in terms of the political left and right in France. While the right under Poincaré stressed the importance of keeping France strong, the left under Herriot emphasized the need for amicable relations with Great Britain.

⁴¹Cmds. 2036, 2037. General accounts of the treaties are given by B. B. Schofield, British Sea Power: Naval Policy in the Twentieth Century, (London, 1967), pp. 90-102, and by P. A. Reynolds, British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years, (London, 1954), chapter vi.

⁴²Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy between the Wars: Vol. I: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929, (London, 1968), pp. 302-03.

⁴³The Ten Year Rule was laid down by Lloyd George in 1919. Military estimates for that year were based on the assumption that there would be no major war involving the British for at least ten years. The damage created by this Rule might have been limited had not Churchill's suggestion that it be renewed each year been adopted.

⁴⁴This process of adjustment is one of the themes of W. N. Medlicott's Contemporary England: 1914-1964, (London, 1967), p. 8. Cf. Zimmern p. 308, where he maintains that British naval hegemony would not have lasted much longer even without the American challenge.

⁴⁵Chaput, p. 87.

⁴⁶Roskill, pp. 306, 322-23.

⁴⁷Quoted in Williams, p. 92.

⁴⁸Zimmern, pp. 337-38.

⁴⁹See Cmd. 2200, p. 4, for the text of the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 12.

⁵¹Zimmern, p. 341.

⁵²"Should We Guarantee a European Settlement?," Round Table, LV (June, 1924), pp. 497, 522.

⁵³Cecil, p. 161.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 158.

⁵⁵League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 23, Records of the Fifth Assembly, pp. 41-45.

⁵⁶F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, (London, 1960), p. 272.

⁵⁷See Cmd. 2273 for the text of the Geneva Protocol.

⁵⁸The complicated arrangements concocted by the drafters of the Protocol are dealt with by P. J. Noel Baker in The Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, (London, 1925). Noel Baker was a Member of Parliament and a good friend of Lord Cecil's.

⁵⁹Cmd. 2368, pp. 6-7. Chamberlain feared the omnipotence of the Council in an emergency. In Down the Years, (London, 1935), p. 154, he summarizes with these words, taken from lines 3-4 of Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," the position of powers expected by the Council to contribute to collective sanctions: "Theirs not to reason why;/ Theirs but to do or die."

⁶⁰Young, pp. 61-62.

⁶¹Zimmern, p. 357. The Round Table, envisioning the possibility of the Empire being plunged into a war with Russia over Bessarabia, opposed the Protocol. "The Geneva Protocol: An Analysis," LVII (December, 1924), pp. 57-61.

⁶²This is one of the reasons why Taylor terms Stresemann "The Good German." From Sarajevo to Potsdam, (London, 1966), p. 81. Northedge, p. 251, also has praise for the Foreign Minister's courage.

⁶³Cmd. 2368, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁴See Cmd. 2525 for the text of the Final Protocol of the Locarno Conference.

⁶⁵After much haggling, and the withdrawal of both Spain and Brazil from the League, Germany was given a permanent seat on the Council on 8 September 1926. The topic is comprehensively covered in Walters, pp. 316-27.

⁶⁶Chamberlain, Down the Years, pp. 159, 166-167; "British Foreign Policy," pp. 539-40.

⁶⁷Earl of Balfour, Opinions and Argument from Speeches and Addresses of the Earl of Balfour: 1910-1927, (New York, 1928), p. 282.

⁶⁸See Cmd. 2964.

⁶⁹Roskill, p. 501.

⁷⁰Cecil, in fact, resigned in August because he considered the Conservative Government obstinant in its approach to disarmament. Cecil, pp. 186-88.

⁷¹Roskill, pp. 505-06.

⁷²"The officials should be, as the Americans say, always on tap and never on top." Cecil, p. 96.

⁷³Quoted in Roskill, p. 505.

⁷⁴Yamato Ichihaski, The Washington Conference and After: An Historical Survey, (Stanford, 1928), p. 152.

⁷⁵Quoted in Survey, 1928, p. 78.

⁷⁶These excerpts are from article one of the Pact. See Cmd. 3410 for the full text.

⁷⁷The British reservations are contained in Chamberlain's dispatch of 19 May 1928, printed as Cmd. 3109. Labour, although enthusiastic about the Pact, was critical of these reservations. H. M. Swanwick, Labour's Foreign Policy: What Has Been and What Might Be, (London, 1929), p. 7.

⁷⁸"The Naval Problem," Round Table, LXX (March, 1928), p. 223.

⁷⁹The London Naval Treaty, signed on 22 April 1930, is contained in Cmd. 3758.

⁸⁰Roskill, pp. 61-63.

⁸¹Vansittart, The Mist Procession: The Autobiography of Lord Vansittart, (London, 1958), p. 404. Cf. Schofield, pp. 106-07; Bridgeman, 77 H. L. Debs. 5s., cols. 436-44; Beatty, 78 H. L. Debs. 5s., cols. 186-96; Taprell Dorling, "The Naval Treaty and After," Nineteenth Century and After, CIX (April, 1931), p. 423.

CHAPTER II

THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION FOR THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: 1926-1930

Although the genesis of the idea of a World Disarmament Conference is to be found in article seventeen of the abortive Geneva Protocol, the concept did not materialize until the League Council established a Preparatory Commission on 12 December 1925. This was the successor of the Coordinating Commission, the short-lived amalgam of the League's Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments and the Permanent Advisory Commission. The Preparatory Commission met in seven sessions between 1926 and 1930 in an attempt to provide a framework for the actual Disarmament Conference. All the major powers, eventually including both the United States and Russia, were represented, as well as "specially interested" parties, including Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Jugoslavia. As Viscount Cecil, the British delegate pointed out, the Commission was concerned solely with questions of principle and method, leaving the inclusion of actual figures for the various categories of armaments to the Conference itself.¹ Arms were to be limited or hopefully even reduced by international agreement, since little faith -- outside of the proclamations of the U.S.S.R. -- was expressed in the possibility of total universal disarmament.

From the outset, most of the powers aligned themselves, with varying degrees of commitment and overtness, with one of three groups.

France and her continental allies -- the Little Entente countries and Poland -- were at the centre of a bloc whose prime concern was security. In his first speech in the Preparatory Commission, Joseph Paul-Boncour outlined the main tenets of French policy, a policy recognizably unchanged from that followed earlier in the twenties with reference to proposals such as the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol. Paul-Boncour believed that the final goal of the Commission was to set up a scheme which would enable League members to mobilise their entire military and economic strength to help any nation unjustifiably attacked. This could be done either through the establishment of an international force under League auspices, or by allowing each country to retain its own supervised forces in order to offer assistance to any state declared the victim of aggression. "If there is no organization of this kind," he asserted, "there can obviously be no question of total or general disarmament." This 'internationalisation' principle was, however, rather a forlorn starting point, as it had been with the still-born draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, since the principle involved commitments which the British refused to contemplate, and implied a level of French armaments which the Germans were not prepared to accept. Paul-Boncour's reference to "nations which for geographical or historical reasons may be exposed to attack..." and his foreboding that "This work must necessarily be accomplished in an atmosphere fraught with memories and fears..."² laid the foundation for the consolidation of a national viewpoint which was to become progressively more inflexible.

Germany and the other defeated nations, Bulgaria, Austria, and Hungary, formed a second group, whose main interest was the achievement

of equality of status, and the disarmament of the other powers down to their own imposed level. Ceaseless allusions were made to four items -- article eight and the preamble of Part V of the Peace Treaties, the correspondence of 16 June 1919, and the Protocol of the Locarno Agreements -- all of which either implied or pledged that the mandatory disarmament of the defeated powers would be followed by general disarmament. The German delegate, Count Bernstorff, not only claimed that "In accordance with these stipulations the German nation is now entirely disarmed" and that others must now do the same, but continued by maintaining that his country's forces "are no longer sufficient to guarantee the national security referred to in article eight of the Covenant."³ Bernstorff was in an enviable negotiating position, since any disarmament of the powers towards the level established in Part V was a relative improvement in the German position. He could righteously assert with impunity that the speakers emphasizing security seemed "at greater pains to discover why we could not disarm than how we could begin to limit armaments."⁴ This cluster of perforce disarmed powers was at times joined by 1930 by Russia and Italy, the former alienated by the ceaseless rebuffs which its schemes for universal disarmament met, and by its own unyielding ideology, the latter disenchanted by the French 'system of Europe' and frustrated by the failure to reach a naval compromise with its western neighbour.⁵

The third group, headed by the world's two greatest naval powers, the United States and Great Britain, hoped to reconcile the divergent views of the French and German groups, by integrating their respective desires for security and equality. Next to the Germans, the

British and the Americans had the most to gain by disarmament. Their homelands were, by virtue of geography, not as vulnerable as were those of the continental powers, they had few land forces to forfeit in any agreement, and both particularly felt the need to appease the twin demands of their publics for disarmament and retrenchment. Cecil made clear to the Commission that armament expenditure in Great Britain resulted in onerous taxation and consequently in an unnecessarily high level of unemployment. Such a statement, which Keynes within a few years was to overturn as a non-sequitur, was certainly prevalent in the minds of those like Cecil who thought of armaments as a "national burden" rather than as "a national privilege which it is a sacrifice to abandon... ." The British public, haunted by memories of Passchendaele, weighed down by taxation, and spurred on by an idealistic longing for peace, placed itself firmly behind the movement for disarmament. Although it was left for the representatives at Geneva to transform national aspirations into international agreements, Cecil had little doubt that "it is public opinion that is the ultimate force on which the League of Nations in all its activities must count."⁶

Despite the unilateral reductions which Britain had effected in all three services since the war, Cecil was idealistic enough at the first session of the Commission to declare that previous reductions should not be considered since they might tend to diminish the scope of future international agreements.⁷ This sentiment was uttered in the aftermath of Locarno: subsequent British policy was not to be so magnanimous. Yet even in the initial stages he was careful to point out that a general disarmament scheme might not assist in the reduction of the

British army, which, like the navy but unlike the air force, was based on the extent of overseas commitments rather than on the strength of foreign competition. As for security, Cecil admitted its importance with regard to disarmament, but he went on to claim that it was equally true that disarmament in itself was the greatest guarantee of security.⁸ Britain's natural rôle, therefore, from the very beginning, was that of a mediator. She held a key position part way between the rival claims of the two continental camps, and for reasons of sentiment and similarity of position she had more influence than any other power on the United States.

Deep-rooted differences in opinion, reflecting the various military establishments of the powers, were evident in all of the discussions. Viscount Cecil represented a nation which had pared its army to the bone, a nation whose real military strength lay in her industrial power, which could not be effective in the early stages of a war.⁹ Cecil was thus anxious to have limitation based on the armaments immediately available on the outbreak of war. What was ultimately of value to a country's military power was incalculable, and since nature could not be limited, mobilisable strength would have to be the criterion. Paul-Boncour, on the other hand, mindful of Germany's superior demographic and industrial potential, proposed that peace arms -- those arms in existence before mobilisation -- should be the yardstick of a nation's might.¹⁰

A similar split between the two delegates was apparent over the matter of distinguishing between offensive and defensive weapons. Cecil maintained that apart from fixed fortifications, any weapon could

be used offensively as well as defensively. He pointed out that militias which had been established during World War I for strictly home defence were eventually sent to the front lines. The French, with their vast stockpile of 'defensive' matériel, were of course not prepared to support the British position. Paul-Boncour claimed that defensive works were not a threat to peace, but were necessary for security, and thus should not be considered for limitation. The American representative, Hugh Gibson, was undoubtedly the closest to the truth when he said that the terms offensive and defensive correctly referred to the use to which an arm is put, rather than to the arm itself. "It is generally accepted," he claimed, "that a vigorous offensive is often the best defence."¹¹

Two sub-committees, 'A' for military and naval affairs, and 'B' for economic, social, and political questions, were created in the spring of 1926. 'B' never did a stroke of work, while 'A' was hampered by its composition. Its five civilians were swamped by fifteen generals, twenty-six colonels, eleven majors, nine admirals, and numerous other military experts.¹² Everyone seemed content to accept principles of disarmament as long as they were not applied to their own country's forces, but little else could be expected of men whose raison d'être was to ensure that their nation was adequately prepared for all conceivable contingencies. Thus it is not surprising that they went through 3,750,000 sheets of paper -- enough for the Polish delegation to walk home on -- to arrive at conclusions as dubious as the one which upheld that the wood and steel needed for rifles was war material, while the whole rifle, if stored, was an inoffensive and

peaceful object.¹³

The next significant session of the Preparatory Commission opened on 21 March 1927 with the submission of draft conventions by both the British and French delegates.¹⁴ Much of the ensuing controversy centred round the question of effectives. Paul-Boncour forwarded his view that only that which could be seen, measured, and supervised, could be limited. A country's "aggressive power" could be controlled, as was apparent from the example of the last war, by limiting the number of troops which are immediately available for the front lines. This was a convenient formula for ensuring that the bulk of the trained reserves of conscriptionist France would not be taken into account. Objections were raised on all sides, naturally enough from delegates whose homelands operated on a voluntary enlistment system. Cecil pointed out that the year allowed in the French draft for the training of reserves was of sufficient duration to produce valuable troops. Count Bernstorff, referring to trained reserves as "the pivot of nearly all continental armies," mentioned that the Treaty of Versailles had specifically prevented the formation of reserves. He suggested that either the training period or the annual contingent of conscripts be diminished. Hugh Gibson added to the barrage of dissent by commenting that one could scarcely neglect trained reserves when Sub-Committee 'A' had decided that reserves in some cases made up ninety per cent of a nation's military strength.¹⁵

To be efficacious, disarmament must not only have considerable scope, but must also be multilaterally accepted. At the third session the Commission found that any hopes that it might have entertained as

to a Permanent Disarmament Convention and international supervision were not acceptable to the most important non-member of the League present, the United States. That country's isolationist and non-committal stance led Gibson to assert emphatically on 13 April 1927 that his Government "could not accept the jurisdiction of the League of Nations and, besides, could not subscribe to an international agreement that was based on control and supervision."¹⁶ Gibson supported the questionable contention that a Convention should be based on no more than good faith -- this had proved successful for the Washington Treaties of 1922, and would be sufficient in future, by avoiding the suspicion and ill-will which accompanied supervision. Gibson concluded with the none too generous concession that if the other powers reached agreement on international control, the United States, although not accepting such control or the authority of any overseeing body, would not oppose its acceptance by others.¹⁷ Such an argument, to those with faith in international organization, seemed on a par with the opposition of a feudal lord to the development of the modern state.¹⁸

Although Cecil felt justified at the beginning of the third session in saying of differences of outlook that "I do honestly and in my heart believe that they are much more cases of misunderstanding than of real fundamental disagreement,"¹⁹ the exact antithesis seems to have been the case. Paul-Boncour was aware of this, perhaps because he realised the difficulties in the way of making his country's attitude more open to compromise, perhaps because he anticipated the later Franco-German showdown. During the key debate on effectives, he

uttered the following words of caution:

But we must not deceive ourselves; we should not press our point so strongly on both sides if principles did not underlie the question of method.

Even less encouraging from the viewpoint of trying to get a large number of diverse nations to reach agreement was his dictum of the same date, 26 March 1927 that

The moment any substantial section of the Commission say that they are unable to accept a particular solution, in my view that solution becomes inadmissible and cannot be pressed.²⁰

The progress of the Preparatory Commission was slow at the best of times. Cecil's statement in May 1926 that he was "sure that there is much greater prospect of useful work and of complete agreement if we do not try and go too fast"²¹ seemed oddly anachronistic a year later. In November 1927 Ramsay MacDonald even introduced a motion in the House of Commons deploring the slow pace of the Commission and the lack of British support for a scheme of international security.²² Perhaps the generally unsatisfactory trend of the Commission is best reflected by the fact that Gibson found it necessary in speaking of his Government's intentions to declare that "we cannot divest ourselves from the idea that the only way to disarm is actually to disarm" ²³

The worst was yet to come. The U.S.S.R., a non-member of the League, had disavowed its own past, and severed most of its connexions with the outside world. It was not until late 1927 that Russia became sufficiently reconciled with Switzerland -- over the murder of a Russian diplomat by a Swiss citizen at the Lausanne Conference -- to request permission to send a delegation to the Preparatory Commission,

which was holding its fourth session in Geneva at the end of November 1927.

As it turned out, Litvinov's proposals for total universal disarmament²⁴ and the subsequent arguments at this session and the next, in March 1928, proved to be both time-consuming and acrimonious. Whereas most of the previous discussions had been ostensibly at least of a technical nature, now the debate took a decidedly political and hence more precarious orientation. While Bernstorff had nothing to lose and perhaps an ally to gain by reacting sympathetically, the French, American, and British delegates came out soundly against any such plan. Lord Cushenden, who had replaced Cecil after he had resigned as a result of his dissatisfaction with British policy,²⁵ launched a broadside and quite spectacular attack on Litvinov and Russia in general. Although Russia and Great Britain were scarcely on good terms, with the latter not even officially recognising the Bolsheviks, Cushenden's bitter political attack was hardly geared to improving relations. The League, he declared, had never received any assistance from Russia, whose Government "have thought it right to lose no opportunity of reviling the League of Nations, and overwhelming it, so far as they could, with scorn and derision." Cushenden's comments revealed a fundamental fear of Bolshevism, a fear the validity of which was soon to be obscured by the more immediate German threat. Speaking of the horrors of civil war, he continued:

... I am only speaking of things that are notorious to the world - for years past the whole basis of the world policy of the Soviet Government ... has been to produce, by some means or other, armed insurrection - which

amounts to civil war - in every country where they can exercise any influence.²⁶

Cushenden said that unless the Russians' policy underwent drastic change, they were the greatest obstacle to their own proposals. If Litvinov wanted melodrama, he succeeded admirably. As Madariaga interprets the whole episode:

The Soviet Delegation's dream was a dramatic presentation of a plan of complete and immediate disarmament by a Bolshevik clad in angelic red and its rejection by a chorus of bourgeois devils, clad in Mephistophelian white.²⁷

The sixth session, part one, held from 15 April to 6 May, 1929, had a few more auspicious moments, with Cushenden deprecating the lack of progress and claiming that "what we want, and have wanted, more than anything else is a convention for the reduction and limitation of oratory... ." Britain's concern with the success of the Commission proved to be more than just theoretical. The British representative said that since his country was not a military power in the continental sense of the term, he would not add to the difficulties of any attempted reconciliation by standing in the way if agreement seemed possible. Cushenden promised that "we shall be able to accept any proposals which meet with the general assent of the other Powers represented here."²⁸ Eight days later, in the interest of agreement, he conceded the French thesis that the inclusion of trained reserves in a disarmament Convention was an impossibility as long as conscription, which could not be outlawed, was in existence.²⁹ This compromise solution may have been forwarded for the sake of appeasing the French, but it certainly did not satisfy either the Germans or the Russians. Bernstorff's suggestion that

different numerical values be assigned to different classes of reserves was curtly dismissed by Cushenden as "too complicated."³⁰ He seemed to prefer to ignore such objections and proceeded with his own pipe dream, declaring that the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which he had signed for the British Empire, had done "more to promote the security of the world, on which disarmament must proceed, than any other event."³¹ Hence the seemingly broad and generous British concession of 19 April 1929 usually failed to prevent splits between at least some of the powers. Usually it did not go into operation in the first instance, since very few proposals which the British refused to accept were construed by them as meeting with "the general assent of the Powers."

During the same session Hugh Gibson similarly agreed to defer decision with regard to land armaments to the countries mainly interested in them. He immediately agreed, moreover, to change the American position on naval armaments, and for the first time he acceded to the French method of limitation, which combined the 'category' with the 'total tonnage' approach. He further assented to any degree of naval disarmament, however drastic, as long as it included all categories of vessels. Once again, however, with the usual minimal effort needed to escape the harsh realities of aggression and power politics, he declared that "The lessons of the old strategies must be unlearned," for "Great arms are the relic of another age... ." "What is really needed," he continued with evident conviction, "is a commonsense agreement, based on the idea that we are going to be friends and settle our problems by peaceful means."³²

It was during this sixth session that the German claims, which were later to be the focal point of the Disarmament Conference, received considerable notice. Bernstorff had previously declared on a number of occasions that Germany had been badly disarmed, that "She was given a system which combines the maximum expenditure with the minimum of efficiency,"³³ and that the powers must follow her example and the pledges of 1919 and disarm down to the Treaty of Versailles level.

On 3 May 1929 Bernstorff commented that if other parties had disarmed as well as Germany, the Preparatory Commission would not have had to sit for three years. Cushenden immediately retorted that

I think everyone understands -- or ought to understand -- that the system which has been adopted for disarmament in Germany arose out of quite exceptional circumstances and cannot offer us any model for our guidance.

As far as any suggestion that all agreements should apply equally to everyone, he flatly stated that "it leaves out of account all the existing conditions and all the realities of the situation." "Such proposals," he went on rather paradoxically, "are based upon logic but not upon statesmanship."³⁴ The question of equality of status for Germany was never to be handled so neatly and in so few words again.

The tense political milieu of the autumn of 1930 cast its shadow over the delegates who assembled at Geneva on 6 November for the last meeting of the Preparatory Commission. Less than two months earlier, the National Socialists had capitalized on the discontentment generated by the Peace Treaties and by the failure of the former Allies to effect the disarmament which they had advocated eleven years earlier. Nazi

strength leapt from an insignificant 12 seats in the Reichstag to a solid 107, and the Communists gained as well. This had two noteworthy results. First of all, it hardened the French in their fears and sense of insecurity: in speeches by Tardieu and Briand on 28 September and 30 September respectively, the need for disarmament was noticeably outranked by the necessity for security and arbitration.³⁵ Secondly, if the Nazi tide was to be stemmed, and German public opinion was to be appeased, the more moderate elements would have to steal some of the thunder of their opponents. In short, Bernstorff would have to make full use of his relatively favourable diplomatic position at Geneva and be more vociferous in his demands.³⁶ His actions were to some extent to determine the fate of his own Government, and to a very considerable extent the fate of international disarmament.

The fear of a rearming Germany was in full bloom in France, and there was at least a nascent awareness of such a possibility in some British quarters. On 11 November, Cecil mentioned at the Commission that schemes for the direct limitation of war material often led to competitions centring around the building of the most efficient arms within the prescribed bounds. It was more than coincidence that the example he used was that of a new German cruiser, built within the 10,000 ton limitation of the Treaty of Versailles, but vastly superior to anything else of a similar tonnage. He was referring to the Ersatz Preussen, the first 'pocket battleship', launched as the Deutschland on 19 May 1931. Cecil thought this problem could be solved by imposing financial restrictions on the building of armaments, but then this raised a problem analogous to the above by virtue of the fact that some

nations could build high quality implements of war at a relatively modest cost. Cecil supported the financial approach since he believed that the camouflaging of expenditure was very unlikely unless a nation purposely set out to deceive others as to its intentions.³⁷

The French were convinced that this very camouflaging was already taking place, and as it turned out, their fears, though rooted in the memories of the Great War, had a justifiable basis in the reality of 1930.

The most benevolent comment which one could make on the draft Convention which the Commission had drawn up by 1930, was that it actually existed. As far as terms were concerned, they contained, as was to be expected, very broad and undemanding lowest common denominators. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett points out that even if the draft was completely and universally accepted, its failure to include the limitation of trained reserves, and the lack of direct limitation of military and naval material, et cetera, meant that a nation could still legally maintain strong armed forces.³⁸

The crux of the draft Convention, however, was article E. A., later designated as article fifty-three, which stipulated that the Convention would not affect the terms of previous treaties. Although the British claimed that they had the Naval Treaties of 1922 and 1930 in mind, Bernstorff had little doubt that the article referred to the infinite perpetuation of the inequalities of the Treaty of Versailles. His vote against the Convention as a whole was based on this article, which seemed to ensure that the Convention "would merely serve as a cloak for the actual state of the world's land armaments, or -- even

worse -- would make it possible to increase those arms." That, he claimed, "would be tantamount to renewing the German signature to the Disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles."³⁹ Bernstorff insisted that he would not recede from his stand that others should disarm according to the same provisions that Germany had accepted, but a vote on this issue proved that direct support was only forthcoming from the U.S.S.R. Cecil sanguinely remarked in the "Final Declarations" that so extensive a move probably would not be accepted at the first Conference, but was a possibility for a subsequent gathering.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, this proclivity to procrastinate and utter vague idealised hopes for the future was to be one of the chief reasons for the Conference's failure. Even the new French delegate, Massigli, after the German rejection of the Convention, deluded himself to the extent that he felt confident in saying that the Commission had "unflinchingly faced realities."⁴¹ The Preparatory Commission had spent five years preparing a Convention which was suffocated by myriad reservations and amendments, which conscientiously ignored most of the pressing political issues which were the foundation of many of the delegates' attitudes, and which was rejected outright by one of the powers whose cooperation was essential.

The public proclamations of statesmen from the end of the last session of the Preparatory Commission in December 1930 until the beginning of the Disarmament Conference itself in February 1932 reflect the ossification of the various viewpoints along distinctly national lines. President Doumergue, who seldom made speeches, was stirred out of his lethargy by the proposals for an Austro-German Customs Union,

which conjured up the vision of a reunited Central Europe. Speaking in Nice on 9 April 1931, Doumergue, after hailing "La Patrie, La France, avant tout," cautioned that France would have to depend upon her own strength unless a viable international force was created:

A country like ours, which has been taught by bitter experience the cruel surprises to which it may be exposed, must not, so long as no powerful international force has been set on foot, allow itself to reduce its own forces below the level demanded by the needs of the security and integrity of the Mother country and the Colonies.⁴²

A memorandum of 15 July, largely drawn up by the Minister of Defence, Maginot, was written in a similar vein. "Common action" based on article eight, as well as "a means of organizing peace," was emphasized. The degree of possible reduction of armaments would be dependent on the scope of "common action," with consideration given to the geographical situation and circumstances of each nation. This led Maginot into a direct refutation of the German claim:

Any levelling or automatic equalization of forces is, for this very reason, excluded a priori, for equalization of armaments as between 2 states would only be justifiable in the unlikely event of their geographical situation and circumstances being identical.

Little room for doubt was left as to the country which would have to receive special consideration, for France, "having thrice suffered invasion in the course of 100 years", had "extensive frontiers lying open to attack, more particularly those frontiers in close proximity to which are concentrated the resources most essential to her economic life and national defence...."⁴³ The one fixed factor in this diversity was Part V of the Treaty of Versailles which stipulated definite relation-

ships between the armaments of four powers. Reduction would have to be made on a multilateral basis in relation to the arms assigned by Part V.

The strict legality of Maginot's argument might have been impeccable, but it was scarcely palatable to either German statesmen or the German public, which had no intention of accepting a position of permanent inferiority which had been forced on it twelve years earlier. Dr. Curtius, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, in evident reply to the French position, stated at the sixty-second session of the League in January 1931, that the Disarmament Conference should "be guided by the fundamental principle of the League of Nations -- that is to say, the equality of all its Members, and should not set security against insecurity and threats against powerlessness." The following March General Groener, speaking in the Reichstag, attacked the very foundation of French policy since the war by claiming that "The Versailles thesis of Germany's sole guilt has long been refuted by international historical research." He claimed that statesmen in other countries agreed that their obligation to disarm was legally binding, a statement which would certainly be accepted by the guilt-ridden and relatively sympathetic British, and rejected as a complete misrepresentation by the French. At any rate, German opinion found his argument attractive, and degree of acceptance is often more important than degree of validity. As far as French claims as to their own disarmament were concerned, Groener pointed out with considerable justification that many so-called reductions were actually just a matter of changes in the system and reorganization. The period of service might have been decreased, but training was more intensive than before, and a very

sizable percentage of conscripts remained in the forces for more than the legal period. Ten days later, on 19 March, Groener claimed that all Germany supported the principle of equality. He even went on to maintain that the psychological effect on Germany as far as her reaction to her inferior status was concerned had not been considered. This proposition was uncomfortably true, and the whole question of disarmament was giving the Germans the opportunity to portray themselves as the ceaseless victims of an unjust peace. In fact, the unarmed and unequal status of Germany readily gained sympathy from the publics of all the western powers except France. Curtius, in a despatch to the Secretary-General of the League on 28 August, resourcefully adapted Maginot's own argument to the case of Germany. Germany's armaments, he wrote, were insignificant in comparison with those of states of a similar size and population.⁴⁴

Any doubt as to whether the two most significant alienated powers, the U.S.S.R. and Germany, would reinforce each other's claims, was ended by the Russian Note of 12 January 1931. The Note gave unqualified support to the principle of complete equality, claiming that such equality had not been given to the U.S.S.R. delegation at the Preparatory Commission. The Note was saturated with bitter references ranging from the accusation of the "inimical atmosphere" created by the Geneva press, to the "obviously biased behaviour of the Commission's President," Jonkheer Loudon of the Netherlands.⁴⁵ This attitude, combined with Litvinov's assurances that he would continue to press for his far-reaching scheme for universal disarmament, despite its almost unanimous rejection,⁴⁶ contributed to the ever-growing

number of ill-omens surrounding the impending Conference.

The British remained relatively aloof from the squabbles on the continent, and contented themselves with pious reaffirmations of their belief in the efficacy of and necessity for disarmament. A mass peace rally was held at the Albert Hall on 11 July, and a peace service at St. Paul's in December was supported with enthusiasm. The focal point of discussion on the disarmament question in 1931 was the debate in the Commons on 29 June. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, spoke at length on the specific commitments -- article eight, Part V, the correspondence of 16 June 1919, and the final protocol of the Locarno Treaties -- which obligated Great Britain to disarm. His sentiments were actually more in harmony with the German view than the French, and he loftily expressed the belief that the Treaty of Peace, "whatever its defects may have been, certainly at some points glowed with the declaration of pacific faith... ." MacDonald concluded a long resume on the extent of British disarmament since 1919 and the paucity of her forces with the assertion that "The reduction must be all round. We have gone pretty nearly to the limit of example." The figures showed that the example of unilateral disarmament would not lead to general disarmament. This amounted to a public proclamation of Britain's poor bargaining position. She had little to barter or negotiate with, virtually ensuring that at best she could act as an 'honest broker' or disinterested mediator between rivalling France and Germany. By maintaining that military security should be subordinated to political security, MacDonald completely reversed a key French tenet. His comments on security were anything but plaudits

for the French system:

it is very often the case that steps taken to produce military security -- that nations, imagining that they are arming themselves to avoid war, are doing nothing of the kind, but are arming themselves to try and secure victory should war break out.

On the one hand MacDonald seemed to realise that not only disarmament but also improved political relations between countries were essential for peace, but on the other hand he naïvely assumed that the failure of the Pact of Paris to eliminate armaments was "only an oversight."⁴⁷

Virtually all the subsequent speakers voiced unconditional approval of the Prime Minister's words. Stanley Baldwin reiterated that Britain was pledged to reduce arms, but cautiously pointed out that no more unilateral disarmament was possible. Sir Herbert Samuel emphasized that with an armed Europe and an untested League "one-sided disarmament may be magnanimous, but it is not peace." Britain, therefore, backed by the force of public opinion, must take a lead at the Disarmament Conference. Noel Baker, who was later to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace, went further than anyone else, stressing that Britain still had far too many arms. Like Baldwin, he considered the Russian attitude and military establishment to be a major obstacle to success.⁴⁸

The anomalous speech of the day not surprisingly was delivered by Winston Churchill. He claimed that disarmament conferences were not only destined to fail, but were positive causes of international ill-will and friction, by their concentration on military matters and their constant postulation of hypothetical wars. Perceptively commenting on the hypocritical tendency to use acceptable words and formulae to veil

national viewpoints, Churchill said that nations "Compound for sins they are inclined to, / By damning those they have no mind to."⁴⁹ His approach to peace was both cautious and eminently realistic. Instead of unilaterally disarming, allowing oneself to become vulnerable, and staking all one's hopes on a Disarmament Conference, one should rather rely on the solving of specific political problems which jeopardise the Comity of Nations, and rely on the increasing confidence of a lengthy peace. This might necessitate, however, a more overt form of power politics, difficult for a Prime Minister who was "bound to cover up everything he says with a canopy of smooth-sounding and comfortable phrases and generalities... ." The British, Churchill went on, would have to attempt to settle the more important differences between the French and Germans, while simultaneously paying close heed to a Russia which was "incalculable, aloof and malevolent." Quarrels over disarmament would merely upset Anglo-French relations, unfortunate in view of the fact that the French army was a stabilizing factor in Europe. The Germans, with twice the potential manpower of the French, should in no case be given military equality. In short, Churchill feared a reoccurrence of the pre-1914 era, and the analogy which he made to the diplomacy of the day was devastatingly accurate:

Before the War, silence was preserved under thick layers of civility and discretion, padded quilts of agreeably embroidered diplomacy, and these were used to muffle all sinister and discordant sounds until in quick succession there came crisis, clamour, mobilisation, censorship, cannonade and our lives were wrecked.⁵⁰

The Preparatory Commission may have served to clarify the political relations between states,⁵¹ but this was a rather dubious

achievement in view of the fact that it did not attempt to iron out the political problems which were revealed, and in some cases merely exacerbate the issues and gave propagandists a sizable audience.⁵² The crucial question of equality of status should have been resolved before the Conference met,⁵³ thus providing the necessary preliminary groundwork and ensuring that no power could threaten to ruin the Conference on this matter by withdrawing. Time was running out for the powers whose approach depended on the rigid preservation of the status quo. Their advantage was an artificial one, since they did not have the potential to justify their overwhelming arms pre-dominance.⁵⁴ Stresemann's death was soon to be followed by Briand's, Europe was in the midst of a depression, and nationalism was on the upswing. The forces of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism which had drawn closer together a year earlier through a mutual desire for treaty revision, and discontent with the French 'system', still had to be contended with. The spirit of the 'Age of Locarno' and the opportunity for international conciliation was rapidly dwindling, and a balance of power was crystallizing which left the British in an awkward and ill-defined position between two increasingly hostile camps.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹League of Nations, Documents of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, 21 March, 1927, Series IV, p. 11. Henceforth referred to as Doc. P.C..

²Ibid., 20 May, 1926, II, pp. 56-58. In his memoirs, Entre Deux Guerres: Souvenirs sur la IIIe Republique: Vol. II: Les Lendemain de la Victoire: 1919-1934, (Paris, 1945), pp. 188, 212, Paul-Boncour maintains that between 1924 and 1934 the importance of stressing the connexion between disarmament and security was presented to him as a standing order. Disarmament would have to be effected alongside Locarno-type accords. The French delegate's basic and unchanging position is summed up in the following, p. 212: "One does not humanise war, one suppresses it. Peace is preserved not by the disarmament of the peaceful countries, but by putting at the service of the international order a force powerful enough to discourage those who would wish to disturb it... ."

³Doc. P.C., 18 May, II, p. 15.

⁴Ibid., 20 May, II, p. 46.

⁵Toynbee discusses this rapprochement in Survey, 1930, p. 125.

⁶Doc. P.C., 20 May, II, pp. 49-50.

⁷Ibid., 21 May, II, p. 88.

⁸Ibid., 18 May, II, p. 15.

⁹Chaput, p. 282.

¹⁰Doc. P.C., Cecil, 18 May, II, p. 17; Paul-Boncour, 21 May, II, p. 84.

¹¹Ibid., Cecil, 19 May, II, pp. 32-33; Paul-Boncour, II, p. 32; Gibson, II, p. 33.

¹²Williams, p. 251.

¹³Salvador de Madariaga, Disarmament, (London, 1929), pp. 167-68.

¹⁴For Cecil's report on the draft Conventions, see Cmd. 2888.

¹⁵Doc. P.C., Paul-Boncour, 23 March, 1927, IV, pp. 21-22; Cecil, 26 March, IV, p. 47; Bernstorff, 27 March, IV, p. 60; Gibson, 27 March, IV, p. 68.

¹⁶Ibid., 13 April, IV, p. 273.

¹⁷Ibid., 13 April, IV, pp. 273-74.

¹⁸Madariaga, p. 188. See Survey, 1927, p. 17.

¹⁹Doc. P.C., 21 March, IV, p. 11.

²⁰Ibid., IV, pp. 45-46.

²¹Ibid., 25 May, 1926, II, p. 77.

²²210 H.C. Debs. 5s., 24 November, 1927, col. 2089.

²³Doc. P.C., 13 April, IV, p. 273.

²⁴Walters, p. 371, has little doubt that the Russian proposals were geared to undermine the Covenant. Williams, p. 258, maintains that "that part of Russian communism which clings to the hope of an approaching world revolution would prefer to see armaments generally abolished so that the great international uprising which they have in mind can proceed unhampered by armed opposition."

²⁵See Cecil, pp. 187-88.

²⁶Doc. P.C., 19 March, 1928, VI, pp. 245-47. In Entre Deux Guerres, pp. 186, 189, Paul-Boncour praises Cushenden, the die-hard conservative from Ulster, for his understanding of and sympathy towards the French position. The British delegate could not stand idle discussions or hair-splitting arguments, a fact which helps to explain his exasperation with Litvinov. Boncour himself found the Russian contribution at Geneva useless and completely negative, at least until 1933, at which time the rise of Nazism forced the U.S.S.R. to become more sympathetic towards the west and its organizations.

²⁷Madariaga, p. 248. The Russians, for their part, saw themselves as adherents of a policy of "minimum and maximum targets," which Koba explains as follows: "There are two sides to our work: to state the most that ^{we} hope to achieve, and to secure, in every given case, the minimum real achievement which is possible." Maxim Litvinov, Notes for a Journal, ed. by E. H. Carr, (London, 1955), p. 173.

²⁸Doc. P.C., 19 April, 1929, VIII, pp. 42-43.

²⁹Although the British realised that it was impossible to outlaw conscription, they had feared it since the time of Cromwell. It suggested to them both internal restriction of freedom and external aggression. After Cromwell, their feelings were confirmed by the French with the advent of the Revolution and Napoleon, and later by the Germans, beginning with the successes of Prussia in the 1860s. The French likewise associated conscription with 1789, but in a favourable sense, since to them it signified liberty and protection against foreigners. Northedge, p. 328; Chaput, p. 288.

³⁰Doc. P.C., 27 April, VIII, p. 116.

³¹Ibid., 22 April, VIII, p. 59.

³²Ibid., 22 April, VIII, pp. 56-58.

³³Ibid., 27 March, 1927, IV, p. 65.

³⁴Ibid., 3 May, 1929, VIII, p. 174.

³⁵Survey, 1930, p. 96.

³⁶Both Walters, p. 441, and Toynbee, 1930, p. 9, make note of the domestic pressures which Bernstorff had to face. In November 1930 the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Reichstag adopted a Nazi suggestion demanding Bernstorff's recall.

³⁷Doc. P.C., 11 November, 1930, X, pp. 69-71. The Times naval correspondent went so far as to claim that the Deutschland was "the most formidable ship in existence." The History of The Times, Vol. II: 1921-1948, (London, 1952), p. 821.

³⁸Wheeler-Bennett, p. 4.

³⁹Doc. P.C., 27 November, X, p. 262.

⁴⁰Ibid., 9 December, X, p. 408. See Cmd. 3757 for Cecil's report on the last session of the Preparatory Commission and the draft Disarmament Convention. On p. 3 of the report, he optimistically states that the Convention "represents a large measure of agreement as to what shall be limited, and how it shall be limited."

⁴¹Doc. P.C., 9 December, X, p. 411.

⁴²D.I.A., 1931, p. 40.

⁴³Ibid., 1931, pp. 43-46.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1931, Curtius, 20 January, 1931, pp. 50-51; Groener, 9 March, pp. 53-55; Groener, 19 March, pp. 52-53; Curtius, 28 August, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁵Ibid., 1931, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁶The Russian proposals had been shelved in 1929. Litvinov did not want to be held responsible for wrecking the Preparatory Commission. Survey, 1929, p. 26.

⁴⁷²⁵⁴ H.C. Deb. 5s., cols. 912-20. To a large extent, MacDonald was interested in disarmament because he believed that it would ensure the peace which he saw as essential to the economic recovery of Britain. Medlicott, p. 241.

⁴⁸²⁵⁴ H.C. Deb. 5s., Baldwin, col. 922; Samuel, col. 930; Noel Baker, cols. 978-79.

⁴⁹Ibid., col. 955. These lines, taken from Samuel Butler's Hudibras, lines 215-16, were repeated by Attlee on 10 November, 1932 in the Commons. 270 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 530.

⁵⁰Ibid., cols. 955-79.

⁵¹D. P. Myers, World Disarmament: Its Problems and Prospects, (Boston, 1932), p. 3.

⁵²For example, Lord Londonderry, who was later part of the delegation to the Disarmament Conference, complains that the Commission "only served to emphasize international differences and to indicate the suspicion with which Germany was still regarded in the European Council Chamber." Marquess of Londonderry, Ourselves and Germany, (London, 1938), p. 40.

⁵³Chaput, p. 295.

⁵⁴Williams, p. 305.

CHAPTER III

THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE IN 1932: THE QUESTION OF EQUALITY

The long-awaited World Disarmament Conference finally met on 2 February 1932 in circumstances which could scarcely be deemed auspicious. If the Conference were to avoid operating in vacuo, certain pertinent facts and events could not be overlooked. The National Socialist resurgence in Germany, with its advocacy of revision, lent credence to French fears; as did the German dissatisfaction with the Draft Convention which the Preparatory Commission had so painstakingly drawn up. The day that the Conference opened, the Japanese attacked Shanghai, and the proposed meeting-time had to be put back so that the delegates could attend an emergency session of the League. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that most countries were still in the throes of a seemingly unsolvable depression. The task ahead of the Conference was formidable. It would have to attempt to transform the popular desire for peace, evident in the five and one-half million signatures, over two million of which were British, attached to petitions forwarded to the Conference, into objective and universal obligations.

The atmosphere in Geneva itself was discouraging. Londonderry, the British delegate on the Air Commission, did not consider the aura of pacifism and sentimentalism in keeping with practical politics,¹ while Sir Samuel Hoare wrote to MacDonald on 4 February complaining about the artificial and neurotic setting, exacerbated by the "army of

savage-looking women, most of them representatives of pacifist societies from the Middle West"² who filled the galleries. At least it was assured that the Conference would not flounder because of insufficient technical preparation, or as a result of inadequate representation. Sixty out of the sixty-four countries invited actually participated, the only absentees being Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Salvador.

The first phase of the Conference lasted until 22 July, and involved the submission and subsequent discussion of a number of plans. Most of them predictably followed the course of those dealt with by the Preparatory Commission. For example, the first scheme forwarded, the French Plan of 5 February, was seen by Tardieu as a return to the Covenant, but was not surprisingly viewed by the Germans as an attempt to perpetuate French military predominance. It seemed fatuous to the Germans that their neighbour to the south-west should be able to retain their huge stocks of field artillery merely by labelling them international.

The chance for a significant reconciliation amongst the continental powers arose in April. The German Chancellor, Brüning, in view of his weak position in the Reichstag, the failure of the Customs Union scheme, and his inability to settle the reparations issue, was greatly in need of a success in foreign policy. The urgency of this need was accentuated on 10 April when Hitler polled thirteen million votes against Hindenburg in the Presidential elections, and once again on 24 April when the Nazis gained in the elections in Prussia, Bavaria, Anhalt, Wurttemberg, and Hamburg. As a result, Brüning, supported by

his Defence Minister Groener, proposed to the powers that the Saar be restored, that the length of service in the Reichswehr be reduced from 12 years to 6, that Germany be allowed to train and arm 100,000 men annually for 8 to 12 weeks in order to build up a militia, and that Part V of the Peace Treaties be superceded by a disarmament Convention. In return for these concessions, Brüning was willing to agree formally not to increase Germany's armaments for five years, or until a new Convention was drawn up. MacDonald, Stimson, and Grandi, convinced of the Chancellor's sincerity and of the security of his position after Hindenburg's re-election, accepted the offer on 26 April. Tardieu, whose support was vital, was telephoned by Hugh Gibson on behalf of the powers, and asked to come to Geneva to join in the negotiations. Two appointments were made, but the Premier kept neither of them, ostensibly on grounds of ill-health. Two explanations have been given for his inaction. First of all, it is understandable that with French elections scheduled for the first week in May, it was difficult for Tardieu to enter into new commitments, particularly when these commitments involved a change which was not supported by the electorate -- the abrogation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Secondly, evidence points to the fact that the arch-intriguer General Kurt von Schleicher told the French Ambassador in Berlin that since Brüning was soon to be replaced by a more amenable individual, negotiations were pointless at this stage.³

As a consequence, Brüning returned to Berlin empty-handed. Here he became the victim of opposition and intrigue from all sides. Pressure from states such as Bavaria and Prussia, and from individuals

such as Schleicher and Groener, convinced him that the S.A. should be disbanded. A decree to this effect was signed by the President and promulgated on 14 May. This was no sooner done than Hindenburg, on the advice of his son Oskar, and as a result of a volte-face on the part of Schleicher and members of the Reichwehr hierarchy such as Hammerstein, changed his mind. The President regretted the edict and decided that Brüning would have to be replaced: the latter not only did not seem to be able to handle the Nazis competently, but he also supported an unforgivable policy of land resettlement in East Prussia, a policy which Hindenburg referred to as "Agrarian Bolshevism." Groener's resignation on 13 May was thus not suprisingly followed by Brüning's on 30 May, after Hindenburg refused to sign any more decrees or accept replacements for Cabinet vacancies. It is ironic that at 9:00 a.m. on the very day that Brüning tendered his resignation, the American Ambassador Frederic Sackett told him that Herriot had just agreed to negotiate at Geneva on the basis of the previous month's proposals. It was too late, however, for this factor to alter Brüning's fate.

Whether or not the cause of disarmament and that of moderate, democratic government in Germany could have been saved by the agreement of all the powers in April is a much contested point. Gordon Craig, Walter Goerlitz, and Erich Eyck agree that a successful foreign policy would not have saved Brüning, since he fell primarily as a result of Hindenburg's betrayal and Schleicher's machinations, culminating in the opposition to his policies on land reform and the outlawing of para-military formations.⁴ Andreas Dorpalen points out

that by putting all his hope and energy into international affairs, Brüning allowed the domestic opposition to entrench itself so effectively that it could not be dislodged or undermined by a victory in foreign policy. John W. Wheeler-Bennett, writing much earlier than the above critics, and confident that Brüning was "the best Chancellor since Bismarck," takes a different stance. He believes that the French Premier's failure to go to Geneva in April irreparably damaged the cause of disarmament, and was the primary factor behind the fall of Brüning.⁵ In a similar vein, it is interesting to note how unambiguously Ramsay MacDonald interpreted these events in a conversation which he had with Beneš in March 1933:

It was, after all, the attitude of the French, when M. Tardieu was head of the Government a year ago, which had blocked things. He had discontinued the negotiations under way which included Dr. Brüning.⁶

Whatever the case may be, there is little doubt that by the beginning of June 1932, moderate, stable, and democratic government in Germany was destined to be a thing of the past for more than a decade.

During the period under discussion, myriad committees at Geneva were set up, but the practice of constantly shifting difficult questions from one group to the next was not unfairly viewed by Tardieu as little more than "a game of tennis."⁷ The proliferation of plans and committees failed to impress all but the most sanguine delegates, who realised, as Norman Davis, American Ambassador-at-large, pointed out at a later date, that "The disappearance of ten big guns and a thousand soldiers would have more effect than the appearance of a thousand plans... ."⁸ Every nation, it appeared, considered its most effective weapons

defensive, while those of other nations were obviously offensive. The exasperated Japanese delegate on the Naval Commission noted this propensity when he asked: "When is a battleship a defensive weapon? When it flies a British or American flag."⁹ The tendency of the Great Powers to do substantially nothing beyond formulating schemes which inevitably became bogged down in quagmires of technical detail led to the formation of the 'Straight Eight' group comprised of the delegates of Spain, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden to counter the 'Crooked Five'. Yet the various nations at the Conference could scarcely be rated accurately by correlating virtue inversely with size, as the following anecdote by Londonderry indicates:

We asked the Afghans why, Afghanistan not being a member of the League, they had come to the Disarmament Conference. They told us that they were short of arms, and thought at a Disarmament Conference there would be a chance of picking up second-hand munitions cheap.¹⁰

On 22 June, the Hoover Plan, the most ambitious blue-print for disarmament up to that date, was revealed by Hugh Gibson in the General Commission. Essentially, the Plan advocated universal reductions of up to one-third in all services, thus ensuring the preservation of relative strengths. The Russians and Germans were receptive, while the French were critical. If the British were sincere in their professed desire to promote general disarmament and appeasement,¹¹ this was an excellent occasion for giving the Americans whole-hearted support and for acting as a mediator between the continental powers. Certainly the British Government could still count on support from the Commons for far-reaching multilateral arms reduction, as had been shown

in the service estimates debates in mid-March. Cocks, the M.P. for Broxtowe, was convinced that if the peoples of the world had their way, they would consign all navies to the bottom of the ocean. Britain had to take the lead, so that once again it would be said that "England saved herself by her exertions and Europe by her example." David Adams pointed out that at the present rate Britain would be paying off the debt on the First War for another 140 years, while Clement Attlee bemoaned the fact that "we get a maximum of expenditure for a minimum of security."¹² Moreover, as Churchill indicates in The Gathering Storm, the disarmament issue, like the Indian question, provided a common bond between the two front benches.¹³

Ramsay MacDonald and Sir John Simon, however, were not convinced that the Hoover Plan was compatible with the already precariously low level of British armaments. This assumption was at the foundation of the rather dubious language contained in the British declaration of 7 July. "Tanks of the lighter type [i.e. the British type]," it was asserted, "cannot be regarded as specifically offensive weapons,"¹⁴ and could not be surrendered by a small voluntary-enlistment army. MacDonald realised that he needed an ally to support him against Hoover, and that ally could only be France. Hence the Prime Minister agreed to drop his idea of including concessions on German equality and the abrogation of the war-guilt clause in the final declaration of the Lausanne Conference on 9 July. A rapprochement was formally brought into being by the signing by Tyrrell and Herriot of an accord on 13 July as to methods to increase European cooperation.¹⁵ Despite denials that the agreement was exclusive, Grandi, the Italian

Minister of Foreign Affairs, resigned a week later, having decided that his pro-League, pro-British friendship policy had not succeeded. The most serious consequence of the accumulated failures, however, was yet to come, moving the Conference into its second phase.

On 22 July the General Commission completed its work with a debate on a resolution summarizing the Conference's progress. The key speech was delivered by Rudolf Nadolny, the German representative. In paradoxical fashion, he declared that the onus was on the disarmed powers, since it was their duty to see that their disarmament was followed by a general disarmament which was in keeping with the military establishments which they had been allowed. The open sore which had festered since June 1919 was once again prodded, but not for the last time. This Conference, stated Nadolny, "is a Conference for the liquidation of the past. It must close a chapter of post-war history which should have been closed long ago."¹⁶ After the usual criticism of the powers' timidity to accept any significant reductions, Nadolny said that his country had only participated at Geneva on the assumption that equality of status between nations would be recognised. It had taken goodwill and courage on the part of Germany to attend after article fifty-three had been included in the draft Convention. Since the existing inequality was not compatible with national honour, the principles of the League of Nations, or international justice, the German Government was no longer able to collaborate in the work of the Conference.¹⁷

Simon had been prepared for Nadolny's speech, and replied that the resolution was not final, and thus did not exclude future

consideration of equality. If political problems were discussed, then the security issue, as well as equality, would have to be brought to the fore. Simon took the unfortunate position of maintaining that at least the resolution did not contain principles antithetical to those held by the governments concerned.¹⁸ His dictum that one must look to the future, not to the past, was an impossible pill to swallow for a nation whose policy was partially determined by a peace treaty which had been formulated in 1919 and bitterly opposed for the better part of thirteen years. Most unofficial British opinion at this time, as reflected in the Spectator, for example, was sympathetic towards the German position. Britain was singled out as the country hindering progress, since Nadolny's contentions on equality were considered to be logically unanswerable.¹⁹

Forty-one countries were in favour of the July resolution endorsing the progress made to date, Germany and the U.S.S.R. were against it, while eight countries abstained from voting. The General Commission went into recess with the hope that the political problems could be ironed out before the Bureau met in September. Such hopes proved to be illusory. On 24 July, Lamoureux, the French Rapporteur Général for finance, in an attempt to counter opposition to increasing military expenditure, proclaimed in the Chamber that the Germans would never get by the Maginot Line of fortresses, which provided France with the security which she required. This statement was blatantly inconsistent with French utterances at Geneva. Two days later General Schleicher launched a full-scale attack on French hypocrisy in a broadcast address from Berlin. It was the Germans, he said,

that needed the security which the French demanded:

The naked fact is that no other European land possesses in so small a degree the security for which, paradoxical though it sounds, precisely the strongest military Power in the world incessantly clamours.

Two alternatives were available: either all the powers would reduce their armaments down to the Treaty of Versailles level, or Germany would reorganise her forces in such a way as to increase her security. "The German people had waited thirteen years for its rights," the General told a New York Times correspondent on 8 August, "and could not wait any longer."²⁰

Speeches by LeBrun and Pétain at the opening of the ossuary at Douaumont, Verdun, revealed a marked hardening of French attitudes, while Alexis Léger at the Quai d'Orsay, in reference to Schleicher's "provocative" pronouncement, commented to R. H. Campbell that

It seemed that whoever was in power, or might come into power, in Germany, the same mentality prevailed -- the mentality of pre-war imperialist Germany.²¹

Léger prophetically warned that as each concession was followed by greater demands, Germany would end up by ignoring her obligations, and would breach the Treaty of Locarno through some illegal act in the demilitarised zone.

Sir John Simon believed that there were three courses which could be pursued in an attempt to solve the issue. Two possibilities, outright rejection of the German claim, or the partial increase of Germany's armaments through the allowance of "samples" of weapons prohibited under the Peace Treaties, were not favoured by either the

British or the French. The only remaining alternative was to deal with the German demand in such a way that general disarmament was effected without involving the rearmament of Germany up to the level of the other powers.²² The situation was not made easier, however, by evidence that the military stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles were increasingly being circumvented, or by the French belief that the Germans in their truculence were making a test of the question of equality,²³ perhaps in an attempt to drive a wedge between the former Allies.

An Aide-Mémoire articulating the German standpoint was given to the French on 29 August. Germany would accept any prohibitions of armaments, provided that they were equally extended to all powers. In practice, this would in nearly all cases involve reductions for all powers except Germany, since she was already subject to Part V. Because of superior war potential, any move towards equalisation was in the Reich's favour. While the French might have been primarily motivated by fear, the Germans appeared to be governed by a more dynamic, nationalistic force: the Aide-Mémoire declared that military discrimination was considered by the German people to be humiliating. A deux conversations with the French were suggested.²⁴

The firm French reply of 11 September was scarcely calculated to provide a ready way out of the impasse. Any conversations outside of the League were out of the question, as were changes in the permanent stipulations of the Covenant. Increased disarmament could only be accompanied by guarantees of security. Fears were openly expressed: "There can be no doubt: rearmament is proposed."²⁵ This document was somewhat surprisingly drafted almost entirely by

the usually conciliatory Herriot, who had come into office after the so-called 'April Tragedy' at Geneva with the hope of improving relations with Germany.²⁶ Unlike Tardieu, he was anxious to settle the equality problem and bring about a real measure of disarmament, both for financial reasons, and because he genuinely believed in the value of disarmament per se.²⁷

Why then, in view of his overall attitude and the relative success of his conciliatory policy at the Lausanne Conference, had Herriot been so uncompromising in his reply of 11 September? The main reason is that he believed that his policy had done nothing to stem the increase in the power of the military in Germany. The Papen-Schleicher government was not one to inspire international confidence, since even Neurath admitted that Schleicher's statements left him open to criticism, and that there were some in Germany who had scant respect for existing obligations and little desire to reach agreement.²⁸ Herriot had visions of Germany freeing herself piecemeal from the Treaty of Versailles, rearming, and then taking action in the demilitarised zone, the Polish Corridor, and Silesia. He certainly did not suffer from the distorted view of Germany held by his socialist counterparts in the British Labour Party. As Herriot said to R. H. Campbell of the British Embassy in Paris, German rearmament could only be directed against one country -- France.²⁹ Both Herriot and Leger remained adamant on the question of any increase in German strength -- both said they would prefer to deal with overt German defiance than acquiesce to even a semblance of rearmament. Neither were to be disappointed as far as overtness was

concerned, but the appropriate counteraction which they had expected from their country never materialised, thanks to the fact that the nascent sense of resignation detectable at this time came into full bloom as a policy of appeasement, at the very time when a firm stand against a rejuvenated Germany should have been taken.

The British, intent on mediating while not leaving France in the lurch, issued a statement on 18 September. It was maintained that in view of the world economic situation, the Germans had chosen a singularly poor time to become intransigent over equality. The statement was saturated with legalistic phraseology. Part V of the Peace Treaties was dealt with by the assertion that "To state what the object or aim of a stipulation is, is a very different thing from making the successful fulfilment of that object the condition of the stipulation."³⁰ An ambiguously stated response to the dilemma was contained in the claim that each nation had to voluntarily accept self-imposed limits which were agreed upon by all nations concerned, thus allowing everyone's armaments to be controlled by a similar and therefore equal process.

The French were pleased, but the German press reacted strongly against the obscure legalistic distinctions. Baron von Neurath said the tone was reminiscent of that in Poincaré's pronouncements, while the point about the poor timing was invalidated by the fact that Curtius had pressed the same claims a year earlier.³¹ Stimson's comments at this time are perhaps the most interesting, for his detachment from the immediate struggle allowed him to air his views -- views not far removed from those of the British and French

in September 1932 -- with complete candour:

Personally he believed, and had found, that stern, blunt methods were effective in bringing the Germans to terms in extinguishing excessive pretensions when more conciliatory methods only prompted further demands. It was a case of the yellow streak in the composition of the bully.

France, he correctly realised, could not face the Germans alone, "perhaps because familiarity had bred contempt."³²

Disenchantment with the Foreign Office's reluctance to concede the equality thesis outright mounted at home. The Spectator, in an article entitled "Sophistry and Statesmanship," said that the declaration of the eighteenth, being an answer to no specific question and addressed to no particular government, was about the most unfortunate document of the past four years, and should not have been issued at all. The statement itself, the writer claimed, "mingles the moralism of the pulpit with the legalism of the Court of Chancery."³³ Alternatives would not remain open indefinitely, and if Germany was not met half-way, she would rearm. As Londonderry says, Simon's "masterpiece of cogent juristic argument"³⁴ provided precisely the sort of fuel that further aroused popular feeling in the Reich. Critics of British disarmament policy at this stage would have been further dismayed had they known that Stanley Baldwin told Tom Jones on 14 September that "Hankey says there was a better chance of keeping the peace of the world when every country had its army big and strong."³⁵ He may have been right, but his sentiments as expressed here were scarcely in keeping with professed British policy. According to Jones, moreover, Simon had managed by the end of

September to reduce the disarmament discussions at Geneva to immobility.

Papen refused to reply formally to the former Allies, convinced that "The paper war was not getting us anywhere."³⁶ However, he did strike out against them in an interview with the Wolff Agency on the twenty-seventh. The French, he concluded, indicated by their reply of the eleventh that they simply did not want agreement. He not unfairly mentioned that the weapons which had been denied to the defeated powers in 1919 because they were considered offensive, were now being jealously hoarded by the former victors on the grounds that they were required for strictly defensive purposes of national security. Papen also retorted to Simon's charge about the timing of Germany's demand by saying that the moment had not been chosen by the Germans: it had rather been a matter of the Disarmament Conference rendering the situation acute as a result of its decisions.³⁷

Public opinion in Germany and the pressure of extremist groups ensured that the Government would not weaken on the equality question. Papen suffered even more than his predecessors from the chronic problem confronting Weimar Chancellors: lack of popular support and an inability to draw together a cabinet which contained men who had both ability and broad appeal. It had been quipped in June when the unpopular 'Cabinet of Barons' was assembled that "the only qualifications for a ministerial portfolio in the new government seemed to be a background in the Gardekürassier Regiment or the title Freiherr."³⁸ Papen managed to get into office largely because Schleicher thought he would be pliant, and also because his

aristocratic tendencies won him the affection of the senile eighty-five year old Hindenburg.³⁹

In an attempt to break the deadlock which was poisoning the international atmosphere, the British forwarded a proposal at the beginning of October for four-power talks, but the idea came to naught because of failure to agree upon an appropriate meeting-place. The British realised that not only was the diplomatic advantage of recognising the German claim fast diminishing, but also that undue delay strengthened the hands of the extreme nationalists whom Papen was trying to keep under control. Concessions grudgingly made in the eleventh hour are seldom met with gratitude, as had been shown in the case of reparations. When the French pointed to their magnanimity at Lausanne, Papen replied that "At Lausanne our creditors merely drew the consequences from an untenable situation,"⁴⁰ a conclusion also reached by Newton in Berlin. Both the British and the French were frustrated by their antagonists' strong psychological position, and were determined to get the Germans' to show their hand. At an Anglo-French meeting at 10 Downing Street on 13 October, Herriot lamented that "The public was at present being deceived by the skill with which the Germans were managing their case."⁴¹ He was convinced that disarmament was the only force which could prevent rearmament, and admitted that the military clauses of Versailles could not be regarded as eternal. If necessary, he "would go to a militia on the Swiss model if enabled to do so by the state of organisation of peace."⁴²

Despite criticism from Tardieu and Flandin on the right and

from Blum and the Socialists on the left who wanted France to disarm down to the Versailles level, Herriot took the initiative in the Chamber of Deputies on 28 October and announced an ambitious set of new proposals. First of all, he suggested the establishment of uniform, short-service, defensive armies on the continent. The emphasis on shorter service as well as the mention of the reduction of effectives was calculated to appeal to the Germans, who would now be able to abandon the professional volunteer-enlistment Reichswehr. Secondly, international control involving rights of investigation would be instituted as well as another regional agreement to supplement Locarno. The plan envisioned both equality of rights and obligations.⁴³ Herriot had a sincere belief in what he called "the organisation of peace," but, as Toynbee says, what separated him from all other French statesmen since the war was his contention that force in itself could not be relied upon.⁴⁴ This acceptance of disarmament was fortunately tempered by an understanding of the problems involved in it. His legitimate doubts had been revealed at Geneva when he despairingly commented that

There have been times when we may have wondered whether the verb 'to disarm' was not in every language an irregular verb, with no first person, and only conjugated in the future tense.⁴⁵

The House of Commons, meanwhile, was growing impatient at the prolongation of the equality question. On 10 November Attlee opened what turned out to be the most important debate on disarmament in 1932 by remarking on the widespread popular disenchantment with the Conference. The Foreign Secretary, he commented, acted at Geneva as

though he was briefed on behalf of the armed forces, rather than the common people. This made about as much sense, he said, as going to a conference to curb over-consumption of alcohol when accompanied by a brewer and a distiller. The main object now, as virtually everyone in the debate agreed, was to give Germany equality of status without allowing any rearmament. "We must get rid, after all these years," beseeched the future Prime Minister, "of this division of the nations into the sheep and the goats." Simon himself made a statement on policy, re-emphasising that reductions already made would have to be taken into account, and affirming that unilateral disarmament was at an end. Echoing Herriot, he claimed that what was needed was "an equal participation in the burdens and advantages of the organisation of common action, all question of rearmament being ruled out."⁴⁶

What Great Britain as mediator would have to try to establish was a new equilibrium which would both be acceptable to the continental powers and have a permanency which would ensure Anglo-French security.⁴⁷ Such a rôle, requiring Britain to take the lead at Geneva, was pressed by almost all the M.P.s who took any sort of interest in the topic.⁴⁸ There was considerable consistency in the views of the Members as to what conditions would have to be fulfilled. First of all, the former Allies were morally obliged to recognise Germany's claim to equality, provided that recognition did not involve any rearmament. Attempts to suppress the Germans had merely led to revolt and reaction, in the shape of the Stahlhelm, the pocket battleship, and the dummy tank. "Is not the present attitude of German statesmen," queried one sympathizer, "the reflection of the

despair and almost the hopelessness with which Germany has seen her rightful hopes thwarted through many long years?"⁴⁹ Secondly, the pledges made, as well as the dangerous international situation, made multilateral disarmament essential.⁵⁰ Hypocrisy of the sort that motivated the British Government to give up submarines which it did not want and tanks over twenty tons which it did not have would have to be ended. That naval experts at Geneva could say that a 35,000 ton battleship was defensive was surely a spectacle fit "to make angels weep and gods blaspheme." George Lansbury pointed out that most of those people who talked about disarmament relegated it to the future, not to the present. Favourable economic conditions and "the will to peace" were essential: the mere signing of a formal document was meaningless as was evident in the case of the Kellogg-Briand Pact.⁵¹

It was felt by almost all Members that failure of the disarmament Conference would result in rearmament and most likely in another war, perhaps stemming from the feeling of révanche in Germany that was not unlike that felt in France after 1871.⁵² It was "now or never," "civilisation's last chance," the greatest crisis since the First War. The feeling of desperation is well exemplified by the fact that the M.P. for Marylebone felt it necessary to speak for the first time in three years, while another broke a ten year record of silence on foreign affairs.

Stanley Baldwin increased the alarm of those gathered in the Commons on 10 November by claiming that the world suffered from a lack of confidence, the greatest cause of which was fear of

bombardment from the air. Conjuring up grim scenes of bombs raining down on helpless families, the Lord President declared:

I think it is well also for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through, and it is very easy to understand that, if you realise the area of space.⁵³

To make this frightening situation seem even worse, Baldwin went on to say that conventions against aerial bombing -- like those against gas warfare -- were useless, since the psychological changes induced by war ensured that any agreements would be broken. This speech, certainly dubious from a technical standpoint, had two unintended and paradoxical effects. On the one hand, its fatalistic tone conveyed to many the impression that the situation was hopeless and nothing could be done, while at the same time it strengthened the hands of the most extreme and irrational advocates of disarmament.⁵⁴

Official British policy was revealed in the shape of new proposals presented by Sir John Simon at the Conference Bureau on 17 November. The usual sort of plan unacceptable to everyone but the proposer was issued, calling for the reduction of all air forces to the British level before a one-third cut all round. Despite the recent cynicism about pledges, Simon hoped that an affirmation of the Pact of Paris would be made, a hope which seemed to indicate that he thought the 1928 agreement was not being adhered to with the appropriate degree of solemnity. The most important statement of the day, however, was that the proposed disarmament convention should apply to Germany and the other ex-enemy powers in the same manner as

it applied to other nations. In short, Part V of the Peace Treaties was to be superceded. Equality of status would thus be obtained by steps as the new convention was drawn up.⁵⁵

The illusions entertained by many M.P.s were not shattered by two exceptionally critical and perceptive speeches on 22 November. The first not surprisingly came from Churchill, who vainly hoped that some of his colleagues could perceive the "iron realities" which lay beneath the surface of European politics. The Germans, he said, followed up every concession granted to them with new demands, since they wanted weapons so that their "sturdy Teutonic youths" could regain lost territories. The British, the only ones to alter their armaments' ratio to their own disadvantage, foolishly pressured the French to weaken themselves. The latter gave Europe stability, since "France, though armed to the teeth, is pacifist to the core." The intentions which the victors voiced at Versailles did not constitute an obligation, and hence Germany should be denied equality: a one-sided armed peace was certainly preferable to a war between equally matched Powers. As far as the actual proceedings at Geneva were concerned, Churchill rightly suspected

that a large part of the object of every country is to throw the blame for an impending failure upon some other country while willing, if possible, to win the Nobel Peace Prize for itself.⁵⁶

These suggestions, as usual, fell on deaf ears.

L. C. Amery followed up Churchill's speech by exposing another widely accepted fallacy. Arms in themselves, it was believed, were the main cause of war, and hence their removal would bring about peace.

Amery pointed out, however, that a relative scarcity of arms had not, for example, prevented a war as large and costly as the American Civil War from taking place, and that while arms could be used to disturb the peace, they could also help to preserve it. At root, armament competitions were just a symptom of strained political conditions. Political problems were being hidden and muddled together under the sham label disarmament, which was viewed as a panacea. The essential problem -- and here Amery was completely correct -- was that of the Treaty of Versailles. If it was just, the Powers should remain strong enough to enforce it; if it was not just, it should be changed.⁵⁷ The candour and truth with which both Churchill and Amery spoke was scarcely appreciated by a House which revelled in speeches couched in sentimental idealism, and preferred as little exposure to reality as possible.

With relentless perseverance, another attempt was made at the beginning of December to resolve the equality issue. Five-power meetings, largely instigated by the British, were held in Geneva in the hope of surmounting the obstacles which up to this time had militated against an agreement. The French and the British would have to maintain a united front in the face of possible German attempts to divide them, in particular bids to entice MacDonald into forcing Herriot to concede. Secondly, the fears aroused by the formation of a new government under Schleicher would have to be overcome, since both Prime Ministers expressed their dissatisfaction with the new Chancellor's proclamations.⁵⁸ Lastly, as MacDonald realised, the two claims of equality and security would have to be forged together in a

single document so that they could be considered "supplementary and complementary." This was a particularly formidable task in view of the Germans' strong tactical position: they would have to be courted, and thus could sell rather than give their cooperation.

By 11 December, the crucial formula of "equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations" had been devised and accepted, and was to be embodied in a future disarmament convention providing for substantial reductions and limitations.⁵⁹ Germany promised to return to the Conference which she had left on 22 July, despite the fact that the ill-defined formula was merely one of principle and made no mention of how or when equality was to be carried out.⁶⁰

Agreement was largely reached because it was realised that disarmament discussions and the anticipated international convention would be meaningless without German participation. Moreover, Germany's intention to return to Geneva ensured the end of her anomalous position in which she had the advantages of being partly within and partly outside the structure of the Conference. Many undoubtedly felt in accord with Mussolini's comment at this time that if things dragged on any longer without some visible success, war would result, since "The Dove of Peace will die from lack of nourishment."⁶¹

It had taken four months of assiduous negotiations to come up with an ambiguous formula which was soon to prove its worthlessness. It had taken five months to extract the conditional return of Germany to the Conference. Yet Simon was so imbued with illusions about

the need to avoid overt failure that when criticism was directed against the five-power meetings in the Bureau on 14 December, he pointed to the fact that Germany had at long last returned, and commented, "Do not look a gift horse in the mouth."⁶² This unfortunate maxim reflected only too well the myopia of many of the advocates of disarmament in London, in Geneva, and elsewhere, and helped to make possible the tragedy which began to unfold in 1933.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

¹Londonderry, pp. 49, 52.

²Viscount Templewood, [Sir Samuel Hoare], Nine Troubled Years, (London, 1954), p. 124.

³Andreas Dorpalen, Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic, (Princeton, 1964), p. 312; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Hindenburg: The Wooden Titan, (London, 1967), p. 383.

⁴Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945, (New York, 1956), p. 439; Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff: 1657-1945, (New York, 1967), pp. 265-66; Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 377-92. Eyck has little doubt as to where the blame lies, as shown in his chapter title, "Hindenburg is Re-elected and Stabs Brüning in the Back."

The intrigues against Brüning were supported by Hitler, who had several meetings with Schleicher at the end of April, and was only too pleased to see the Chancellor replaced. Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, (New York, 1964), p. 188.

Winkler maintains that Franco-German differences in disarmament policy were too great to be overcome, even if Brüning had remained in office. H. R. Winkler, "Arthur Henderson," in The Diplomats: 1919-1939, ed. by Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, (Princeton, 1953), p. 340. Northedge, p. 376, agrees that failure was inevitable. Cf. H. C. Hoover and Hugh Gibson, The Problems of Lasting Peace, (Garden City, 1942), p. 163.

⁵Dorpalen, pp. 325-26; Wheeler-Bennett, Hindenburg, pp. 382-83, 395. Wheeler-Bennett's attitude can be partially explained by the fact that he was a close friend of Brüning's. Both Wheeler-Bennett in The Disarmament Deadlock, pp. 33-34, and Sir Charles Petrie in Twenty Years' Armistice and After: British Foreign Policy Since 1918, (London, 1940), pp. 121-23, believe that MacDonald should have put greater pressure on the French or made the German offer public in order to circumvent those who hoped for failure.

⁶E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., Documents on British Foreign Policy: 1919-1939, (London, 1947-), Second Series, Vol. IV, p. 521. Henceforth referred to as D.B.F.P. Londonderry, p. 53, similarly blames the French. Cf. Paul-Boncour, pp. 214-15, who defends Tardieu by maintaining that his basic position was in keeping with both previous and successive French policy. However, he does admit that the Premier had no marked penchant for the League, and was, moreover, particularly attached to the Treaty of Versailles since his rôle in drafting it was second only to that of Clemenceau's.

⁷Survey, 1932, p. 215.

⁸D.B.F.P., IV, p. 351. Also see Chaput, p. 302.

⁹Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, The Disarmament Deadlock, p. 36.

¹⁰Londonderry, p. 125.

¹¹For example, as expressed by Simon to Bernstorff, 18 March, 1932, and then to Nadolny, 30 March. D.B.F.P., III, p. 514.

¹²262 H.C. Deb., 5s., Cocks, cols. 1552, 1728; Adams, cols. 1718; Attlee, cols. 1665-66.

¹³The Second World War: Vol. I: The Gathering Storm, (London, 1948), p. 79.

¹⁴Cmd. 4122, p. 5. Attlee remarked a few months later that any man who had been at the Somme or Paschendaele could readily tell the "experts" about the tank's aggressive capacities. 270 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 532.

¹⁵Cmd. 4131.

¹⁶League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Arms, (Geneva, 1932-36), Series B, Minutes of the General Commission, Vol. I, p. 186. Henceforth these documents will be referred to as Rec. Conf.

¹⁷Ibid., Series B, I, pp. 186-88.

¹⁸Ibid., Series B, I, pp. 193-95.

¹⁹"Disarmament: Six Months' Harvest," Spectator, CXLIX (30 July, 1932), p. 145. The New Statesman and The Times had long accepted the German position. On 30 January the former contained a reference to the need "for unqualified recognition of the principles of equality of status," while on 2 February an article in the latter had recommended "the timely redress of inequality." Jordan, pp. 149-50.

²⁰D.I.A., 1932, 184-85.

²¹D.B.F.P., R. H. Campbell (Paris) to Simon, 23 August, IV, p. 101. Leger had worked under Briand from 1925-32, and from him had learned the need for French security, the importance of British friendship, and the necessity of establishing European peace on a broad basis. E. R. Cameron, "Alexis Saint-Leger Leger," in The Diplomats, pp. 380-83.

²²D.B.F.P., Simon to Campbell, 27 August, IV, pp. 106-07.

²³Leger's view, as reported in Campbell's telegram to Simon, 30 August. Ibid., IV, p. 112.

²⁴D.I.A., 1932, pp. 186-88.

²⁵Ibid., 1932, p. 192.

²⁶Wolfers, pp. 85-86.

²⁷Survey, 1932, p. 269. D.B.F.P., IV, pp. 118, 126, 169-70. Herriot believed that an agreement was necessary so that Germany would not choose the path of rearmament.

²⁸D.B.F.P., Memorandum by Simon on a conversation with Neurath at Geneva, 23 September, IV, pp. 196-98.

²⁹Ibid., Campbell to Simon, 14 September, IV, p. 167.

³⁰D.I.A., 1932, p. 196.

³¹D.B.F.P., 21 September, IV, p. 194.

³²Ibid., 19 September, IV, p. 182.

³³"Sophistry and Statesmanship," Spectator, CXLIX (24 September, 1932), p. 360.

³⁴Londonderry, p. 46.

³⁵Hugh Dalton, Memoirs, Vol. II: The Fateful Years: 1931-1945, (London, 1957), p. 26, quoting Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters: 1931-1950, (London, 1954); pp. 56-57.

³⁶Franz von Papen, Memoirs, (London, 1952), p. 204.

³⁷D.I.A., 1932, pp. 205-08.

³⁸Craig, Prussian Army, p. 456.

³⁹Bullock, p. 211ff. Hindenburg by this time was not really a free agent, largely because he had very little idea of what was going on apart from what Papen and a few others told him. Wheeler-Bennett, Hindenburg, pp. xiv, 442.

⁴⁰D.I.A., 27 September, 1932, p. 208.

⁴¹D.B.F.P., IV, p. 233.

⁴²Ibid., 14 October, IV, p. 244.

⁴³Paul-Boncour, pp. 223-24, 229, says that this new plan was forwarded to end the sense of isolation which the French felt after their rejection of the Hoover Plan. He blames the vagueness of the proposals' disarmament measures on the General Staff, who refused to

act on the promises of 1919, continually opposing any scheme which would in any way diminish French stocks of arms or cut into existing defence programmes.

⁴⁴Survey, 1932, p. 274.

⁴⁵Rec. Conf., 22 July, Series B, I, p. 195.

⁴⁶270 H.C. Deb. 5s., Attlee, col. 533; Simon, col. 547.

⁴⁷Chaput, pp. 307, 317.

⁴⁸For example, by Williams, Law, and Mander, 270 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 593, 604, and 611 respectively.

⁴⁹Ibid., Cocks, col. 565.

⁵⁰The desire of most M.P.s for some kind of disarmament was still an accurate reflection of the state of popular opinion. This was exemplified on a small scale by a debate between Cecil and L. C. Amery on 24 October at the Cambridge Union. Cecil's motion supporting British disarmament down to the German level swamped his opponent's rearmament proposal by a vote of 377 to 89. Amery claims that the Union was so unfavourably disposed towards his position that he was almost denied the opportunity of speaking.

The ambiguous and non-committal reaction of the National Government to the popular demand for action is exemplified by the Prime Minister's words to a peace delegation headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in October: "I nope you will go on pressing, and press and press. Do help us to do the broad, just, fundamental, eternal thing." L. C. Amery, My Political Life: Vol. III: The Unforgiving Years: 1929-1940, (London, 1955), pp. 146-47.

⁵¹270 H.C. Deb., 5s., Cocks, col. 570; Lansbury, cols. 623-28. Lansbury, usually depicted as the most hopeless sort of pacifist, is defended by his biographer (and son-in-law), Raymond Postgate, who claims that "despite occasional rash rhetoric," he did not advocate the complete abolition of arms. The Life of George Lansbury, (London, 1951), p. 287.

⁵²270 H.C. Deb., 5s., Chamberlain, col. 558; Cocks, col. 571; Guest, col. 577; Pickford, col. 583; Mander, 612; Spears, col. 622.

⁵³Ibid., col. 632.

⁵⁴Amery, p. 147; Hoare, p. 122; 272 H.C. Deb., 5s., Churchill, col. 91; Amery, col. 117. The latter said that Baldwin's speech "dealt not so much with the problem of preserving peace as with the problem of mitigating the horror of war."

This speech and others like it helped to convince Viscount Rothermere that Britain should embark upon a policy of extensive air rearmament. By the latter part of 1933 his articles in the Daily Mail were the reductio ad absurdum of alarmism. On 14 November, for example, he wrote: "Next time, immediately war is declared, the commander-in-chief of the enemy nation will press a button, and 20,000--perhaps 50,000 aeroplanes, laden with bombs and gas, will rise into the air and set off at more than 200 miles an hour to rain destruction on this country." Quoted in Rothermere, Warnings and Predictions, (London, 1939), p. 30.

⁵⁵Cmd. 4189; Rec. Conf., Series C, Minutes of the Bureau, I, pp. 89-95.

⁵⁶272 H.C. Deb., cols. 82-88.

⁵⁷Ibid., cols. 113-19; see also Amery, p. 145.

⁵⁸D.B.F.P., Herriot, 1 December, IV, p. 316; MacDonald, 10 December, p. 366; cf. Papen, p. 216ff. The Times was unhappy with some of Schleicher's less conciliatory utterances, but had some nebulous idea -- supported neither in France nor in Germany itself -- that the General was influenced by international opinion. The following sanguine and non too accurate statement was printed in the 17 December edition: "The Chancellor and his Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, are at least both men with whom it should be easy to negotiate. They are apparently masters of the situation at home, and they are frank and conciliatory in their defence of foreign policy." The History of The Times, pp. 830-31.

⁵⁹D.I.A., 1932, pp. 233-34.

⁶⁰Survey, 1932, p. 289; Wheeler-Bennett, The Disarmament Deadlock, p. 84. While MacMillan termed the formula "ingenious," Churchill considered that its acceptance was tantamount to "being smothered by a feather bed." Harold MacMillan, Autobiography, Vol. I: Winds of Change: 1914-1939, (London, 1966), p. 391; Churchill, p. 76.

⁶¹Dalton, p. 35. The comment was made by Mussolini to Dalton.

⁶²Rec. Conf., Series B, II, p. 213.

CHAPTER IV

THE 'MACDONALD PLAN' AND THE END OF THE DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

"Oh, Equality, how many sins are committed in thy name!"
Salvador de Madariaga

What Toynbee terms as the annus terribilis,¹ 1933, began ominously with the appointment of Adolf Hitler on 30 January. This epochal event did not, however, occasion the fear and dismay that it merited. The newly formed cabinet was a coalition, a fact which led Papen and other non-Nazis to believe that they could "hedge Hitler round" with conservatives, or neutralise his movement by forcing it to take on public responsibilities.² Constantin von Neurath, Foreign Minister since June 1932, and Bernhard W. von Bülow, State Secretary since 1930, retained their offices, confident that the Wilhelmstrasse would continue to fulfil its traditional rôle, undisturbed by major changes in foreign policy.³ The British people were unable to take the new Chancellor, "with his Charlie Chaplin moustache and his everlasting raincoat,"⁴ too seriously, while their press reflected a sense of anti-climax, as though the change in government was largely routine. Former insights were unfortunately buried under new hopes. Although the Economist expressed "feelings of bewilderment and concern," the Manchester Guardian was cautiously optimistic, while The Times claimed that "No one doubts Herr Hitler's sincerity... ." ⁵ Lord Rothermere was closest to the mark, though not in the sense that he imagined, with his remark

on the thirtieth that "This will prove to be one of the most historic days, if not the most historic day, in the latter day history of Europe."⁶

Hitler wasted no time in informing his ministers of what had to be done. At a cabinet meeting four days after his accession, the Chancellor stated that "rebuilding the armed forces is the most important prerequisite for attaining the goal: reconquest of political power." Rearmament was a dangerous course, but would make possible the conquest of areas in the east which could be ruthlessly Germanized. On 8 February Hitler further revealed what the basic tenets of his foreign policy would be by stating that for four or five years "the main principle must be: everything for the armed forces."⁷

The Disarmament Conference reopened in Geneva in February and soon was fraught with the usual difficulties. The French were justifiably alarmed when the barracks at Kehl in the demilitarised zone were occupied on 9 March, in defiance of the Locarno agreements. Added to this was the mushrooming in the number of Germans under arms, as storm detachments of the Stahlhelm were authorised as auxiliary police. Faced with this threat, Paul-Boncour believed that any substantial French disarmament would be suicide, unless continental armies could be transformed into uniform short-service militias subject to an effective system of supervision.⁸ For their part, however, the Germans were in favour of retaining the Reichswehr whether or not a militia system was adopted, largely because the former contained the essential well-trained officer core necessary

for an expanded force. Neurath maintained that the French would never disarm, and stressed to Nadolny that this stance should be taken advantage of if failure of the Conference became inevitable: the French would have to be made to appear responsible for any breakdown.⁹

A fresh initiative in line with the declaration of 11 December appeared to be needed, and MacDonald's National Government, with its overriding concern to see others peacefully resolve their quarrels,¹⁰ was the logical source for such an initiative. Anthony Eden, despite his feeling that "John Simon's brilliant analytical mind hated to take decisions,"¹¹ drew up a complete British convention with his colleagues Cadogan and Malkin, and forwarded it to the Secretary of State. Simon at this point did realise the precarious state of the Conference and was receptive to the idea of submitting a comprehensive settlement at Geneva, while the Prime Minister himself, although not a great believer in the Genevan system, agreed that the Disarmament Conference was suffering from "persistent and pernicious anaemia."¹² Simon held that no nation would disarm until it saw the complete picture, so that it could calculate how its total reductions compared with those of its neighbours, and could evaluate the degree of security which would be guaranteed once disarmament was carried out.¹³ This would only be possible in a Convention which was broad in scope and contained actual figures for the arms of the various countries. To underline the sense of British enterprise and hence lessen criticism in his own country if the Conference drew a blank, MacDonald decided to go to Geneva himself to present the new scheme on 16 March.

The Prime Minister began his speech to the General Commission by saying that all the problems and declarations needed to be coordinated and consolidated into one plan, putting an end to the "compartmental" approach. Risks would have to be taken for peace, to avoid the certainty of war, since with failure "the stream of events would drive with increasing swiftness to catastrophe." Skepticism, "the blight of international peace," would have to be overcome. Closing with an accurate but seldom followed maxim, MacDonald stressed that disarmament was not an end in itself, but rather just a contribution to peace.¹⁴

The main distinguishing feature of the so-called 'MacDonald Plan' was the inclusion of figures for the first time. Continental armies were to be composed of conscripts of no more than eight months training, and were to be standardized along the militia lines that had been suggested by the French. The draft further provided for the reduction of the more obvious offensive weapons, such as tanks and heavy guns. France and Italy were to accede to the terms of the London Naval Treaty of 1930, while capital ship building was to halt with the sole exception of Italy, which was allowed one additional vessel to counter-balance France's Dunkerque and Germany's Deutschland. The plan accepted the abolition of the much-heralded bombardment from the air, with the usual rider that it be allowed for police purposes in outlying areas.¹⁵ The major powers were allocated 500 war aeroplanes each, a stipulation scarcely geared to work to the disadvantage of the British who were a lowly fifth in air force strength, still far behind the modest minimum which they had set for

themselves in 1923.¹⁶ Security was dealt with by a provision for consultation in the event of a breach of the Briand-Kellogg Pact, while supervision fell under the auspices of a Permanent Disarmament Commission. The present Convention would cover a transitional period of five years in which international confidence could be restored. The Peace Treaties would be superseded, and the way cleared for a further Convention hopefully incorporating more drastic reductions.

The small powers reacted enthusiastically, while the major powers were cautiously sympathetic. Nadolny not unfairly considered the Plan an attempt by the British to find an acceptable middle way which involved minimal sacrifices for themselves.¹⁷ He believed that the land reductions were small, yet "nevertheless perceptible," although the figures of 200,000 colonial troops allowed for France and 200,000 home troops for Poland were unsatisfactory. The idea of a five year transitional period was acceptable, but in light of the decision of 11 December it was essential that Germany should be allowed at least qualitative equality during the first stage. Nevertheless, it was deemed worthwhile to negotiate on the basis of the Plan, since Nadolny felt that improvements could result from possible French willingness to concede in order to avert failure.¹⁸

While the French were pleased to see some of their own ideas in MacDonald's scheme, they were unhappy about the meekness displayed towards agreements for mutual assistance and supervision. Moreover, they were not disposed to view a German force of 200,000 -- twice the Versailles level -- with equanimity, particularly since this number

was not to include all the para-military and political groups under arms.¹⁹

Ramsay MacDonald defended his Plan in the Commons on 23 March, at which time he emphasised that although German equality had to be translated into practical terms, it was being effected against "an ominous background full of shadows and uncertainties."²⁰ While the subsequent debate revealed far less sympathy for the German cause than had previously been the case, there was none the less widespread support for much more stringent disarmament than the 'MacDonald Plan' provided for.²¹ More encouraging, however, was the growing realisation that revision of the Treaty of Versailles was the key to the whole problem at Geneva. Churchill, with his accustomed lack of inhibition, pointed out that the Plan of the "boneless wonder" MacDonald was the fifty-sixth one forwarded thus far at the Conference. If executed, it would lead to the doubling of the German army and the halving of the French, making the combined German-Italian forces 50,000 stronger than the French.²² These revelations led to the usual denunciations of Churchill, which included the accusation of one M.P. that he was "one of the greatest dangers in the country at the present time."²³ Eden answered the various criticisms for the government by maintaining that European peace was impossible while France was heavily armed and Germany virtually disarmed. Recalling the impressiveness of the speeches of both Churchill and Eden during the debate, Harold MacMillan says that like most other Members he unhesitating supported Eden, largely because he "seemed to embody all the aspirations of the war

generation."²⁴ The war generation, it seems, did not want to face the realities of power politics and rearmament any more than it wanted to return to the days of Passchendaele and the Somme.

Before returning from Geneva, MacDonald, convinced that Mussolini was a peace-loving man who opposed German rearmament, and sold on the necessity for Anglo-French-Italian cooperation,²⁵ visited Il Duce in Rome. The latter had devised a Four Power Pact²⁶ which provided for consultation amongst the Powers on the questions of disarmament and economics. The Pact was eventually signed on 7 June after substantial French amendments had rendered it innocuous. Despite Mussolini's public professions, he told Hassell, the German Ambassador, that the four way talks would facilitate German rearmament by isolating the common antagonist France.²⁷ As it turned out, the Pact achieved no such object, and was invoked, with dubious success, only once, at Munich in September 1938. While Tom Jones claimed that most of his associates discounted the value of the Prime Minister's roving missions,²⁸ Churchill referred to the Pact in the Commons as one between "the master of sentimental word and the greatest master of grim and rugged action," an agreement which would give the former "the same sort of pleasure that 1,000 years ago was given to a Pope when an Emperor paid a visit to Canossa." "We have got our modern Don Quixote home again," Churchill continued with reference to the Geneva and Rome visits, "with Sancho Panza [Simon] at his tail, bearing with them these somewhat dubious trophies which they have collected amid the nervous titterings of Europe."²⁹

By the beginning of May the discussion at the Disarmament

Conference on the 'MacDonald Plan' had reached a standstill. Nadolny refused to have all the police of a military nature included in the number of effectives, yet insisted that the overseas troops of France stationed close to home be added to her forces total. The transformation of the Reichwehr into a militia was still rejected, ironically because it was claimed that a conscript army was too prone to the influence of extremists. Eden despairingly wrote Baldwin on 1 May that

One feels it is rather like a 1917 campaign in Flanders; we can only make such progress as we may in the mud between the pill-boxes and leave the strong points to be attacked at the last - and as in Flanders, the pill-boxes are occupied by Germans...³⁰

Eden concluded from talks with Nadolny that German demands were "preposterous." The latter did not just want samples of weapons during the first stage, but rather a full-scale equality which was tantamount to rearmament.³¹

Nadolny's intractability and the unfavourable reaction of other delegates to it led to the isolation of Germany in the debates on the 'MacDonald Plan.' The German position was not improved by the foreign reaction to events in the Reich itself. The treatment of Jews, Communists, the press, and left wing political parties, as well as racial and revisionist propaganda, underlined the discrepancy between the new régime's pledges and its actual intentions. As John Simon told Rosenberg at Geneva on 8 May, the result of all this had been that "In two months Germany had lost the sympathy which she had gained here in ten years."³² Reports from the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold, an experienced, competent, and perceptive diplomat,³³ reinforced the totally negative opinion that

individuals in the Foreign Office in Whitehall such as Sir Robert Vansittart had of the Nazis. Rumbold claimed that the National Socialists had only one programme apart from staying in office, and that involved a revival of militarism and rearmament before anyone could interfere.³⁴ German foreign policy was based on principles hostile to those of the League of Nations, a fact exemplified by Mein Kampf,³⁵ a book which remained unread and ignored by all but a few astute observers like Rumbold and Vansittart who comprehended that its outrageous premises were increasingly being implemented in a terrifyingly literal sense.³⁶ Rumbold realised that in its quintessence Hitlerism was a movement of revolt against the Treaty of Versailles, an attempt to restore self-respect, a nationalism generated by an inferiority complex. The Ambassador, who unhesitatingly spoke of Hitler, Goring, and Goebbels as "notoriously pathological cases," refrained from indulging in the usual blind hope for the future. In a memorandum read to the Prime Minister and circulated to the Cabinet at the end of April, Rumbold maintained that

I fear it would be misleading to base any hopes on a return to sanity or a serious modification of the views of the Chancellor and his entourage.³⁷

What was to be done? Vansittart telephoned Eden in Geneva on 10 May, and affirmed that he and the Cabinet believed that the guilt of Germany had to be publicly exposed so that her isolation and obstinacy would be evident to world opinion. In a similar vein, Brigadier Temperley, a member of the delegation at the Conference, advocated the calling of Germany's bluff. France and Great Britain

should not allow Germany to break the Treaty of Versailles or to rearm. Hitler was a "mad dog" and unless there was a change of heart in Germany, war was inevitable. One should "Trust in God and keep your powder dry."³⁸ A public warning emanated from the House of Lords on 11 May, when the Secretary of State for War, Viscount Hailsham, stated that the Treaty of Versailles would still bind Germany if she left the Disarmament Conference, and in fact its sanctions would be brought into effect if Germany rearmed.³⁹ The following day Paul-Boncour supported Hailsham's stand in an interview with the press.

On 16 May Franklin Roosevelt sent a telegram to the heads of all the nations taking part in the Disarmament Conference.⁴⁰ The message contained a plea for practical results at Geneva, spoke of the desirability of an agreement aimed at ensuring that no country would increase its arms beyond the level allowed by treaties, and suggested the negotiation of a "solemn and definite" pact of non-aggression. The French Ambassador in Washington was told that the President had wanted to attenuate any unfortunate results which might arise from the speech Hitler was scheduled to make on the seventeenth, and he also wanted to show that the United States sympathised with the French in their fear of a rearmed Germany.⁴¹

The Germans faced a dilemma. They were isolated in their desire to substantially modify the 'MacDonald Plan', an isolation made all the more apparent by the warnings about rearmament which they had received from all sides -- from Hailsham, Paul-Boncour, and Roosevelt. The Germans feared that their adversaries might concert with a view to

ending the Conference to Germany's disadvantage, both with reference to armaments and to world opinion. The balance of power was distinctly becoming unfavourable to the Reich, as Nadolny realised when he wrote to Berlin that

This isolation of Germany, as far as can be ascertained here, is based on currents of international politics and not on the treatment of the disarmament problem itself.⁴²

As a result, at a Conference of Ministers' meeting on 12 May, Hitler decided that since open rearmament was impossible for the time being, a declaration in the Reichstag was necessary to allay the fears of foreign critics and illustrate the unity of the German people on the question of disarmament. The announcement that the Führer planned to speak led to considerable consternation in foreign capitals. Hoesch wrote from London on the 16th that the British viewed the proposed speech as crucial: "On it, it is believed, will depend the fate of the Disarmament Conference and the World Economic Conference, the formation of American policy, and perhaps even war and peace."⁴³

The Führer's anxiously awaited statement was a masterpiece of conciliation, carefully constructed for foreign consumption. Germany had faithfully disarmed herself, claimed the Chancellor, despite the fact that most of the contemporary problems could be ascribed to the unwisdom of the Treaty of Versailles. The Reich would have to be granted at least qualitative equality, since in its defenceless state it actually had greater justification for security than its over-armed neighbours. Hitler projected the image of a concerned and cooperative statesman by warmly welcoming both Mussolini's Four Power Pact idea and the proposals of the American President. The Chancellor

emphasized that the one great goal of the world had to be international peace, since further conflicts would only lead to economic disruption, uncertainty, fresh sacrifices, and war, which was alluded to as "infinite madness." There was only one ominous note in this speech characterised by moderation, and that was the warning that "It would be difficult for us as a constantly defamed nation to continue to belong to the League of Nations."⁴⁴

This single speech had a grossly disproportionate effect on British and American public opinion, since "It comforted the hearts of all who were still hoping, against their own instinctive convictions, that the new Germany might become part of a tranquil Europe."⁴⁵ Both Leger at the Quai d'Orsay and Rumbold in Berlin, however, had anticipated German gestures of goodwill, in the words of the latter, "to lull the outer world into a sense of security." Rumbold's contention that "Hitler himself is, with good reason, a profound believer in human and particularly German credulity"⁴⁶ was devastatingly accurate.

Eden wrote from Geneva on 18 May that though the tone of Hitler's speech was encouraging, the content did not indicate any substantial advance in the German attitude.⁴⁷ None the less, the following day Nadolny accepted the 'MacDonald Plan' as the basis for discussion and also as the framework of the anticipated final disarmament Convention.⁴⁸ On the twenty-second Norman Davis translated Roosevelt's platitudes into practical terms by announcing the will of the United States to disarm down to the level of the Peace Treaties.⁴⁹ Full support was given to the 'MacDonald Plan'. More

significant was what was considered a noticable, albeit very modest and negatively stated, move away from isolation. Davis said that his country was willing to consult in the event of aggression. Beyond this, he could promise that if the transgressor was agreed upon, the United States could at least be depended upon not to interfere with any collective action taken by other powers. Although this newly formulated American position somewhat enhanced the agreement of the powers on the security articles of the British Draft, the contribution of Davis, like that of MacDonald, was too slight and too late to make any long-term difference. As Baldwin confided to Thomas Jones, Davis often appeared to be "just a peripatetic windbag, without authority, getting in the way of busy men."⁵⁰

The Disarmament Conference was in adjournment from 8 June until 16 October, first of all to make way for the London Economic Conference, and then to give Arthur Henderson the opportunity to attempt to effect agreement on outstanding differences amongst the powers.

The summer of 1933 was highlighted by two critical issues, the first involving German rearmament in the air. Candid comments by both Rittmeister A. D. Bolle and Erhard Milch, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Air, revealed that the Germans were building military aircraft and planned to continue doing so, since the British seemed to be tacitly accepting the rearmament programme by not bothering to protest. Göring himself publicly proclaimed the Reich's need to build aeroplanes for police purposes. In a memorandum of 14 July, Robert Vansittart urged that action be taken, since the

Germans were being so overt and seemed to be making a test case out of the matter.⁵¹ As a result, B. C. Newton in Berlin made representations to Bülow, who was both "unrepentant and uncompromising," claiming that "the unjustified and uncalled for" enquiries were all the result of misunderstanding, since the German Government was in favour of the complete abolition of all military aircraft, a proposal which they had supported at Geneva.⁵²

The British were eventually given all the denials and assurances which they wanted to hear, with the German Secretary of State surpassing his previous sophistry with a letter of 11 August refusing the British Air Attache the right to discuss technical matters in future with officials of the Air Ministry, on the grounds that such a privilege could lead to future misunderstandings.⁵³ The whole issue merely served to point up British timidity when countered by intimidation, and revealed their basic desire to avoid any sort of meaningful confrontation. The matter cost the Germans no more than a bit of shortlived anxiety, and in no way impeded Göring's plans for a powerful Luftwaffe. Meanwhile, the army was making plans for twenty-one peace-time divisions, and Krupps was busily turning out tanks under the guise of an "Agricultural Tractor Scheme."⁵⁴

The second issue during the summer revolved around Nazi activities in Austria, activities which ranged from the dissemination of propaganda to terrorism. Vansittart had little doubt that an Anschluss was pending, the precursor of action against Poland. "Never," wrote the Under-Secretary at the end of August, "was writing larger on the wall"; disaster was only avoidable if the Germans had a

sudden change of heart, an unlikely contingency since "the true German nature has never changed."⁵⁵ As far as the immediate situation was concerned, it was best to encourage Mussolini to restrain Germany, while at the same time promoting Franco-Italian conciliation, so that it would be possible to concert British, French, and Italian policy. Hitler, however, had no desire to provoke a crisis at this stage, and the summer witnessed no more than the beginnings of interference by Germany in the affairs of her neighbour to the south. Representations by the British, French and Italians, combined with the need to deal with pressing domestic problems, deterred the Chancellor from embarking upon a risky policy vis-à-vis Austria.

The events of the summer of 1933 merely served to make the powers more acutely aware of their fundamental predicament. As The Times viewed the situation on 28 June:

Europe in fact is placed in the dilemma of having to refuse to force what reason suggests should at least in part be conceded, or else of yielding to extremism what earlier was refused to moderation.⁵⁶

Arthur Henderson's July tour of European capitals did nothing to alleviate the disarmament imbroglio. Hitler, flourishing a large rhino whip in his interview with the Disarmament Conference president, complained that "Europe had never gone beyond theoretical and platonic declarations of sympathy for an equal treatment of Germany," while Mussolini told Henderson that anxiety over the Nazis was "thoroughly displaced."⁵⁷ Concessions were refused on all sides. As a consequence of this failure, conversations among the former allies

were resumed in September. The French adopted a new position, from which they would not retreat. The Convention, they claimed, would have to be based on a preliminary probationary period, during which the Reichswehr could be transformed into a militia under the auspices of an International Disarmament Commission. During this stage no rearmament was to take place, since it was pointless to give Germany prototypes of weapons which would be destroyed during the general disarmament down to the Peace Treaty level in the second stage. Each of the two periods, it was suggested, should last four years, with the implementation of the proposed disarmament contingent on the success of supervision during the first phase. Daladier, whose enthusiasm for disarmament was curbed by his more sober cabinet, tried vainly to get the British to agree to sanctions. Simon felt that the releasing of Britain and France from disarmament obligations in the event of a breach by Germany would by itself effectively take the place of regular sanctions. Baldwin fatuously argued that sanctions were impossible since Germany was the nation most likely to break a Convention, and hence she would consider that they were specifically aimed against herself.⁵⁸ In any case, the British, French and Italians were able to agree in principle on supervision and the idea of two stages, although the latter were alone in their willingness to allow Germany prototypes of hitherto prohibited weapons during the first period.

The Germans themselves accepted the notions of supervision and stages, in principle, but could not reconcile themselves to the denial of defensive weapons during the first phase, since this seemed

to imply that the hard-won equality of 11 December 1932 was not going to be put into practice. Blomberg and Hitler feared that if negotiations continued, a new plan less palatable than the 'MacDonald Plan' might be forced upon them. Hence Bülow wired Ernst von Weizsäcker on 4 October that he should inform Simon that since immediate equality was essential, a trial period was unacceptable.⁵⁹ The original idea of a five year Convention as stipulated by MacDonald would have to be adhered to. These ideas were formally set down in an Aide-Mémoire of the sixth.⁶⁰ While the French might worry about the Germans gaining some advantage by rearming during the early part of the first stage before such illegal action could be discovered or countered, the Germans felt that the French might refuse to disarm after the first four years by merely claiming that the system of supervision had not worked in the manner which had been deemed necessary.⁶¹ Daladier and various premiers would come and go, but the French General Staff with its fears and security-mindedness would remain the same, and would do its utmost to prevent disarmament.

Simon at long last seemed convinced that the Germans had completely abandoned the concept of samples and stages and were intent on rearming. Security, he maintained, would be grossly inadequate without the preliminary stage which the French so justly demanded.⁶² Davis and Eden concurred in the belief that the French could not fairly be expected to make any further concessions. Appeasement had run its course, at least for the present. The Italians, likewise, were displeased. Suvich in Rome surpassed Aloisi's comment in Geneva that the new German demands represented "a small step backwards" by

referring to them as "a remarkable step backward."⁶³ And Il Duce himself, although in favour of allowing the Germans samples in order to prevent the failure of the Conference, espoused the bluntest condemnation of all, ironic in view of his later connexion with his fellow Fascist dictator:

German policy was at the moment in the hands of two men, Hitler and Goring, one a dreamer, the other an ex-inmate of a lunatic asylum, neither of them conspicuous for reason or logic and both suffering from an inferiority complex and a bitter sense of injustice.⁶⁴

On 13 October, Sir Eric Phipps telegraphed from Berlin to the Foreign Office to comment on a top-level meeting held in the Chancellor's office. Phipps stated that "My informant's impression was that nothing dramatic had been decided."⁶⁵ The same day Sir Ronald Graham forwarded a despatch from Rome indicating that the Italians "consider it very unlikely that the Germans will leave the Disarmament Conference at this stage."⁶⁶

The next day, the Germans not only left the Disarmament Conference, but also announced their intention to leave the League of Nations. Hitler proclaimed that he planned to dissolve the Reichstag in order to make way for new elections, as well as hold a referendum on his foreign policy. The decision to withdraw had been made by the Chancellor on the thirteenth, in anticipation of John Simon's address at the reopening of the Disarmament Conference scheduled for the morning of the fourteenth. As the Germans expected, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs advocated precisely what they refused to accept -- the "recasting" of the 'MacDonald Plan' so that

the original five years was expanded into two four year periods, the first of which outlawed all rearmament. The change was essential because "The present unsettled state of Europe is a fact, and statesmen, in drawing up their plans, have to face facts."⁶⁷ Both Paul-Boncour and Norman Davis immediately endorsed the modifications in the British Draft, while the Italian delegate remained silent after Simon's speech.

In the early afternoon of the 14th Arthur Henderson read to the Conference a telegram which he had just received from Neurath.⁶⁸ The latter said that the failure of the armed powers to disarm made the fulfilment of the Reich's recognised claim to equality impossible, hence ensuring the Conference's failure. The onus for the unsuccessful efforts at Geneva was thus skilfully laid upon the shoulders of the former allies. A statement by the German Foreign Minister two days later was more explicit.⁶⁹ Blame was placed four-square upon the proposed changes in the 'MacDonald Plan'. The disarmament terms of the second stage were nebulous, making it feasible that after four years of supervision they might never be carried out. Neurath accused the powers, at least all those other than Italy and the United States, of trying to form a united front against Germany. This charge was not altogether inaccurate, since the unnamed culprit responsible for what Simon had referred to as the "unsettled state of Europe" was scarcely a matter of dispute amongst the powers to which Neurath referred. Most of the latter's fire, and that of his country's press, was aimed against the British, who were accused of retreating away from the plan of their own Prime Minister. Ammunition for the German case was

paradoxically supplied by the utterances of Lloyd George.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the Führer was busily softening the blow by claiming, truthfully enough, that only a "madman" would consider a war against France, since such an event would be neither moral nor rational. The withdrawal announcement itself was ironically juxtaposed by the Chancellor to a pious proclamation of the German Government's adherence to a policy of sincere love of peace and readiness to come to an understanding...⁷¹

Basically, Hitler left the Disarmament Conference because what he considered the perpetuation of the distinction between "victor" and "vanquished" interfered with his desire for substantial rearmament and an aggressive foreign policy. That withdrawal was a clear-cut issue on which he could unite the nation and appear once again as the champion redresser of injustices was evident by the overwhelming approval voiced for his policy in the plebiscite held on 12 November. Moreover, the Wilhelmstrasse approved of the Chancellor's first major action in foreign affairs, largely because it was in keeping with previous German policy towards the League of Nations and its Conferences. Bülow did not like the Genevan system, while Neurath had previously suggested withdrawal himself. Although Papen thought a break with the League would cause an unnecessary loss in prestige and confidence, he supported leaving the Conference.⁷² Nadolny alone remained irreconcilable, and protested to Hindenburg, who curtly told him, "You're slated for Moscow. Get yourself there!"⁷³ German diplomats and officials on the whole were confident that Hitler's popular policy would not involve any undue risks, and as far as the

disarmament decision was concerned, they were not to be proved wrong.

Although Anthony Eden recorded in his diary that it was just as well that the Genevan sham was at an end,⁷⁴ most non-German comment was unfavourable. Daladier replied to Hitler's professions of peace by saying that France was "deaf to no appeal, but blind to no act. If one sincerely wishes for understanding, why begin with rupture?"⁷⁵ While Mussolini complained to Hassell that "England had moved completely over to the side of France and was even outdoing her,"⁷⁶ he told Sir Ronald Graham that the action of the Germans was "extremely unnecessary and foolish": the latter were "burning down their house in order to cook an egg."⁷⁷ Those who were shocked by the withdrawal had failed to pay close enough attention to warnings such as those contained in Hitler's speech of 17 May, or to the words of Bülow and Neurath in their conversations with various diplomats.⁷⁸

John Simon went to great lengths in the Commons on 7 November to rebuke Neurath's contention that the British stance had left the Germans no alternative but to withdraw. The latter, Simon said, were on the threshold of receiving what they had always demanded. Austen Chamberlain was more frank. He said that the Germans were dismayed when the Americans and British actually accepted supervision, since they had expected a refusal which would give them a pretext to rearm.⁷⁹

The acknowledged pressure of public opinion ensured that the British would not formally abandon efforts at Geneva, anaemic as they were once Germany was gone. John Wilmot, Labour candidate in the

East Fulham by-election of 25 October, won a victory which was particularly resounding in view of the Tory incumbent's previous margin. Wilmot ran on a platform of pacifism.⁸⁰ Baldwin later admitted that this minor election helped to indicate to him that the National Government would have fallen had it supported extensive rearmament. He claimed that the coalition government could not rearm without specifically receiving a mandate to do so, while at the same time maintained that there was no point in calling an election on an issue which would not receive popular support.⁸¹ While the failure to rearm cannot be excused, it must be admitted that the fall of the Government over a policy of rearmament would have been disastrous since it would have made way for a completely pacifistic successor.⁸² Certainly Labour had an even more unrealistic approach than the Government. The Hastings National Conference in October unanimously adopted resolutions supporting the total disarmament of all nations, and a General Strike in the event of war. With a very few notable exceptions, therefore, British politicians differed only in the degree of their lack of realism and foresight in the sphere of international relations. The result of this was that British policy was vague, ambiguous, and indecisive, as exemplified by the following statement by Baldwin on the Air Force Programme:

One of my difficulties here and of anyone indeed who has to speak on this matter, is that they cannot tell all they know. It is impossible. If I were to stand here and to say where the difficulties are, and who the people are who raise those difficulties, it would be perfectly impossible ever to advance one inch with regard to disarmament. One's lips are sealed.⁸³

The Lord President was afraid to take a candid approach to foreign policy because he felt that it would jeopardise the cohesiveness of his party and the unity of the populace at large. Moreover, beyond the constant reiteration of his "measureless horror of war," he preferred to ignore foreign affairs and channel his concern toward's his country's unemployed.⁸⁴

The Disarmament Conference carried on a shadow existence from the time of the German withdrawal right up until the last meeting of the General Commission on 8 June 1934. The moribund Conference continued into 1934 primarily because the League found it impossible to confess defeat, and none of the nations involved wanted to be saddled with the responsibility for ending the débâcle.⁸⁵ Mussolini became more sympathetic towards Hitler, and in November 1933 Signor di Soragna, head of the Italian delegation, announced that his delegates would serve only as observers, and would abstain from voting on "delicate" issues. Norman Davis returned to Washington, while American policy reverted back to strict isolationism. The Germans' extra-Genevan armaments demands, involving a land force of 300,000 with full defensive weapons, ensured that the French, particularly under the resolute Barthou, would never accede to Hitler's proposals.⁸⁶ Permanent deadlock ensued. The coup de grâce of the Conference, although it scarcely needed one, came with the announcement of the vastly increased German armaments budget for 1934-35, making it irrefutably obvious that Hitler had every intention of rearming on a vast scale, irrespective of what the other powers sought. The Conference which had begun with energy and the fervour of idealism in 1932 faded into oblivion with scarcely a whimper in 1934.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

¹Survey, 1933, p. v.

²Goerlitz, p. 270; Papen, p. 251. A full account of the machinations leading up to Hitler's appointment is given in Bullock, p. 243 ff.

³Gordon A. Craig, "The German Foreign Office From Neurath to Ribbentrop," in The Diplomats, pp. 407-09.

⁴MacMillan, p. 385.

⁵The Economist, 4 February; The Times, 3 February. See Brigitte Granzow, A Mirror of Nazism: British Opinion and the Emergence of Hitler: 1929-1933, (London, 1964), pp. 217-21, and The History of The Times, pp. 881-82.

⁶Rothermere, p. 11.

⁷Paul R. Sweet, Margaret Lambert and Maurice Baumont, eds.-in-chiefs, Documents on German Foreign Policy: 1918-1945, (London, 1957), Series C, Vol. I, p. 37, Conference of Ministers, 3 February. Henceforth these documents will be referred to as D.G.F.P. All citations in this chapter are from Series C.

⁸French fears were expressed at an Anglo-French meeting in Paris on 10 March. See D.B.F.P., IV, pp. 503-06. As Leger later pointed out, French statesmen not only had the German threat to consider when dealing with disarmament, but also the mood of their own people. He told Tyrrell on 18 May that any French Government which "permitted the destruction of one of the old cannons on the Place des Invalides, would be hounded out of office." D.B.F.P., V, p. 263.

⁹D.G.F.P., Foreign Ministry (henceforth F.M.) to Nadolny, 15 February, I, p. 43; F.M. to Nadolny, 13 March, I, 154.

¹⁰Walters, p. 543.

¹¹The Earl of Avon, [Anthony Eden], The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators, (London, 1962), p. 28. Eden's claim as the initiator of the 'MacDonald Plan' is supported by Walters, p. 542.

¹²D.B.F.P., 11 March, IV, p. 513.

¹³Ibid., IV, pp. 535, 537. Bülow added to Blomberg's Memorandum of 19 February that great changes would only be possible if the total results and effects of various disarmament measures could be anticipated. This was the very problem which the British Foreign Secretary was attempting to surmount. D.G.F.P., I, p. 57.

¹⁴Printed as Cmd. 4279; in Rec. Conf., Series B, I, pp. 352-57.

¹⁵Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air from 1931-35, defends this reservation by calling it "comparatively minor," yet necessary for the control of mandates and "undeveloped regions." Others are not convinced. Eden blames both Londonderry and Simon for insisting on this stipulation, claiming none too kindly that its retention was all part of his chief's rôle in "out-Heroding Herod." Londonderry, pp. 56-57; Eden, p. 30.

¹⁶The 1923 scheme called for 52 squadrons for home defence, and a first-line strength of 550. Basil Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom, vol. in History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Military Series, ed. by J. R. M. Butler, (London, 1957), p. 5.

¹⁷D.G.F.P., Nadolny to F.M., 20 March, I, p. 187.

¹⁸Rec. Conf., Nadolny at the General Commission meeting, 27 March, Series B, II, p. 393.

¹⁹Ibid., Massigli at the General Commission meeting, 27 March, pp. 388-90. Paul-Boncour, p. 208, recounts that on one occasion he was told by MacDonald that an international force was as unnecessary as the need to carry a revolver in his pocket when he travelled to Paris. Boncour quickly replied: "You have not needed a revolver, because there have been a thousand police constables who took care of your security as well as that of the other inhabitants of Paris."

²⁰276 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 513-15.

²¹Ibid., David Grenville, col. 521; Major Sir Archibald Sinclair, col. 532; Sir Stafford Cripps, col. 607.

²²Ibid., cols. 543-44. While Churchill had a pro-French bias, individuals such as Lord Londonderry attributed the Conference's lack of success to the intransigence of France and her allies. In March 1933 Londonderry wrote to his wife from Geneva that he feared a war of prevention by the Little Entente against Germany while she was still weak. Londonderry, pp. 50-51.

²³276 H.C. Deb., 5s., Mander, col. 583.

²⁴MacMillan, p. 393.

²⁵D.B.F.P., Anglo-French Conversation at Geneva, 16 March, IV, p. 539.

²⁶The final version is printed as Cmd. 4342.

²⁷D.G.F.P., Hassell to F.M., 15 March, I, p. 167. Mussolini's fundamental aim in proposing the Pact was to direct German ambitions towards the east, rather than towards Austria. Northedge, p. 384.

As an extra-Genevan agreement amongst the great powers, the Pact helped to further diminish the role and prestige of the League. Seton-Watson, p. 101; Viscount Cecil, All the Way, (London, 1949), p. 204.

²⁸Jones, letter of 23 March, pp. 103-04.

²⁹276 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 552.

³⁰Eden, p. 37.

³¹D.B.F.P., 10 May, V, p. 211. Massigli reached the same conclusions. Rec. Conf., 28 April, Series B, II, p. 425.

³²D.B.F.P., Simon to Rumbold (Berlin), 10 May, V, p. 212.

³³Rumbold had always been cautious and critical of the Germans, but with the advent of Hitler he became extremely fearful and pessimistic about the future. F. L. Ford, "Three Observers in Berlin: Rumbold, Dodd, and Francois-Poncet," in The Diplomats, p. 446. Vansittart, p. 476, claims that Rumbold "hid penetration behind a blank face." Cf. Dalton, p. 39, and Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott, The Appeasers, (Boston, 1963), p. 17 who also have praise for the Ambassador.

³⁴D.B.F.P., Rumbold to Simon, 26 April, V, pp. 48-55.

³⁵Mein Kampf was seldom considered a serious work since few could comprehend the ideological and totalitarian ideas behind it and hence were prone to regard it as totally incredulous. Bernard Crick in the Introduction to Granzow, p. 11.

³⁶Dalton was another of the few who were aware of the actual state of Germany, and were fearful of her intentions. After his visit to the Reich in April, he wrote that "Germany is horrible. A European war must be counted now among the probabilities of the next ten years." Dalton, p. 41. Duff Cooper reached similar conclusions after a visit to Germany two years later. Duff Cooper, Old Men Forget, (London, 1954), p. 182. Medlicott, p. 333, points out that Dalton, despite his awareness, approached the armaments problem ambiguously. On the one hand he thought that rearmament was essential, while on the other he blamed the lack of British disarmament for the failure of the Disarmament Conference.

³⁷D.B.F.P., V, p. 53.

³⁸Ibid., Enclosure in Cadogan to Leeper, 10 April, V, pp. 214-17. Vansittart laments in his memoirs, p. 478, that he sent Temperley's Memorandum to the cabinet, but to no avail.

³⁹87 H.L. Deb., 5s., cols. 897-98. Hitler, on 12 May, and Feine, in a F.M. Memorandum of 15 May, expressed concern over Hailsham's statements. However, on the sixteenth Hoesch wrote from London that the War Secretary's remarks "need not be regarded as a deliberate political statement." Hoesch realised that the British were not able to escape from the dilemma arising from the clash between their desire to avoid commitment and their fear of Germany. D.G.F.P., I, pp. 411, 439, and 445-46 respectively.

⁴⁰Rec. Conf., Series B, II, pp. 461-62.

⁴¹D.B.F.P., Tyrrell to Simon, 17 May, V, pp. 246-47.

⁴²D.G.F.P., Nadolny to F.M., 5 May, I, p. 379.

⁴³Ibid., Hoesch to F.M., 16 May, p. 445.

⁴⁴D.I.A., 1933, pp. 196-208; D.B.F.P., V, pp. 252-58.

⁴⁵Walters, p. 547. Craig concurs with Wheeler-Bennett's verdict that Hitler's conciliatory speech "could scarcely have been equalled by Stresemann or Bruening." Craig, "The German Foreign Office," in The Diplomats, p. 413, quoting p. 118 of The Disarmament Deadlock.

⁴⁶D.B.F.P., Rumbold to Simon, 26 April, V, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁷Ibid., Patteson (Geneva) to Simon, 18 May, V, p. 262.

⁴⁸Rec. Conf., Series B, II, p. 464.

⁴⁹D.I.A., 1933, pp. 209-10.

⁵⁰Jones, p. 129

⁵¹D.B.F.P., V, p. 424.

⁵²Ibid., Newton to Vansittart, 29 July, V, pp. 455-62.

⁵³Ibid., Enclosures in Newton to Vansittart, 14 August, V, pp. 497-99.

⁵⁴Goerlitz, p. 274.

⁵⁵D.B.F.P., Memorandum of 28 August, V, p. 550. Vansittart was a Germanophobe. In The Mist Procession, p. 46, he maintains that he did not dislike all Germans, just "the bloody-minded bulk." Gilbert and Gott, p. 19, label him a crude racist, while D. C. Watt believes that his hatred of the Germans during the thirties sprang more from racial theories than from a detestation of Nazism. Watt, "Britain, the United States and Japan in 1934," in Personalities and Policies, (London, 1965), p. 85.

⁵⁶The History of The Times, p. 882.

⁵⁷D.G.F.P., Memorandum by Neurath, 22 August, I, p. 686; Hassell to F.M., 16 August, I, p. 657.

⁵⁸D.B.F.P., Anglo-French Meeting, 22 September, V, p. 618.

⁵⁹D.G.F.P., Memorandum by Bülow, 4 October, I, p. 887; Bülow to Weizsäcker, 4 October, p. 888.

⁶⁰D.I.A., 1933, pp. 279-80.

⁶¹D.G.F.P., Hitler at his Conference of Ministers, 13 October, I, p. 923.

⁶²D.B.F.P., Simon to Sir Ronald Graham (Rome), 6 October, V, p. 660.

⁶³D.G.F.P., Bülow to Weizsäcker, 4 October, I, p. 889; D.B.F.P., Graham to Simon, 7 October, V, p. 664.

⁶⁴D.B.F.P., Graham to Wellesley, 11 October, V, p. 674.

⁶⁵Ibid., Phipps to Wellesley, V, p. 679.

⁶⁶Ibid., Graham to Wellesley, V, p. 680.

⁶⁷Cmd. 4437; Rec. Conf., Series C, II, p. 182.

⁶⁸Rec. Conf., Series B, III, p. 646.

⁶⁹Ibid., Series C, II, p. 185.

⁷⁰Lloyd George criticised the Government for not carrying out its "promise" to disarm. See, for example, 281 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 96-104. Gilbert and Gott, p. 36, attribute the following reference to Hitler to the former Prime Minister: "I only wish we had a man of his supreme quality at the head of affairs in our country today."

⁷¹D.I.A., Broadcast speech by Hitler, 14 October, 1933, pp. 288-91. Hitler's apparent moderation at this point was the result of his fear that action might be taken against Germany. Neither a Polish invasion of Prussia nor a French occupation of the Ruhr seemed to him to be beyond the realm of possibility. Mowat, p. 425; Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, (London, 1966), pp. 213-14.

⁷²Papen, p. 297.

⁷³Craig, "The German Foreign Office," in The Diplomats, pp. 414-15.

⁷⁴Eden, Diary entry for 14 October, p. 47.

⁷⁵Quoted in Survey, 15 October, 1933, p. 318.

⁷⁶D.G.F.P., Hassell to F.M., 14 October, I, p. 929.

⁷⁷D.B.F.P., Graham to Wellesley, 15 October, V, pp. 684-85.

⁷⁸For example, Phipps wrote Simon on 5 October that Bülow "observed that if there were any indications of a wish to impose unfair conditions on Germany by a united front she would leave Geneva." Ibid., V, p. 658.

⁷⁹281 H.C. Deb., 5s., Simon, cols. 42-59; Chamberlain, cols. 90-95.

⁸⁰Dalton, a member of Labour's National Executive and an intimate of Wilmot's, claims that the latter's pacifism was a myth. According to Dalton, Wilmot was an advocate of collective security through a strong League, and did not favour either pacifism or unilateral disarmament. His electoral victory was to a considerable extent the result of his own ability and personality, and the outcome of good electoral organisation. Dalton, p. 47.

But The Times not only congratulated Wilmot on his victory, but seemed to take his success as an indication that "average British opinion" should be followed more closely. The History of The Times, pp. 883, 887.

⁸¹317 H.C. Deb., 5s., 12 November, 1936, cols. 1143-45. This so-called confession has always been cited by those eager to indict him for putting his party ahead of his country. A. L. Rowse called this speech "ignominious" in 1941, rather immoderately proclaiming that "To-day the name of National Government stinks in the nostrils of all decent people... ." Baldwin's reputation was partially restored in 1949, however, by R. Bassett, who called the "confession" a myth, pointing out that Baldwin was correct in assuming that no support for rearmament would have been forthcoming from 1932 to 1934, and that it was only possible to leave the question of arms to the 1935 election, as was actually done. C. L. Mowat, in the most reasonable article on this topic, partially concurs with Bassett, but quite legitimately states that ministers do not have to receive a mandate when the issue is one involving national safety. Rowse, "Reflections on Lord Baldwin," Political Quarterly, XII (July, 1941), p. 312; Bassett, "Telling the Truth to the People: the Myth of the Baldwin 'Confession,'" Cambridge Journal, II (November, 1948), pp. 84-95; Mowat, "Baldwin Restored?," Journal of Modern History, XXVII (June, 1955), p. 173.

⁸²Vansittart, p. 444; Hoare, p. 131.

⁸³283 H.C. Deb., 5s., 29 November, col. 1014.

⁸⁴Young, p. 176; Northedge, p. 386; Jones, p. 57. Also see 309 H.C. Deb., 5s., 9 March, 1936, col. 1830. L. C. B. Seaman refers to Baldwin and MacDonald as the "Great Tranquillizers." Post-Victorian Britain: 1902-1951, (London, 1967), p. 167.

⁸⁵Walters, p. 553; Wheeler-Bennett, The Disarmament Deadlock, p. ix.

⁸⁶Londonderry's attitude towards Hitler's terms is typical of the advocates of appeasement who were blindly sympathetic towards Germany. Hitler's proposals of April 1934 were considered to be eminently reasonable. They were not implemented "owing to the stubborn opposition of France and our failure to make any serious move in the direction of shaking that attitude." Londonderry regarded the termination of the Disarmament Conference as an indication that British diplomacy had reached its nadir. He was not far wrong, but not for the reasons which he imagined. Londonderry, pp. 59-62.

CONCLUSION

The wind blows where it lists,
But all the power it plies
Cannot dispel the mists
That darken English eyes.

Robert Vansittart

The attitude of Great Britain towards the Disarmament Conference can only be understood by an examination of the factors which moulded and conditioned British policy after the First World War. First of all, the rôle of public opinion must be considered. The widespread popular sympathy for Germany which was particularly evident before 1933 can be traced back to guilt feelings resulting from the apparent injustice of the Peace Treaties. This feeling was reinforced by the tone of many of the histories written in the twenties on the origins of the Great War. Many historians, such as G. P. Gooch and G. Lowes Dickinson, members of the Union of Democratic Control, analyzed the pre-1914 era as one in which "international anarchy" and hostile alliances made a clash inevitable. The notion of a conscious policy of aggression on the part of Germany was tacitly omitted, or even denied. The work of J. M. Keynes on the economic consequences of the peace further strengthened the hands of those who were eager either to whitewash the Germans or to blame contemporary problems on the folly and unfairness of the former Allies.

Ironically enough, it was the supposedly most enlightened organs of the press which supported these proclivities. Geoffrey Dawson and Barrington-Ward of The Times were much more generous towards the Germans

than towards the French. In the early interwar years, it was suspected that French stocks of armaments and firmness towards Germany indicated a desire for continental hegemony, or at least a policy which if followed would involve unwanted commitments or unfortunate alignments of powers. In the thirties, Dawson, an intimate of Neville Chamberlain's, was disenchanted with the French for their failure to appease their former foes. "I do my best night after night," the editor complained, "to keep out of the paper anything that might hurt their [the German] susceptibilities."¹ The Germans, after all, were a bulwark against Bolshevism; they had been treated unfairly, had justifiable grievances, and must be given a chance.

The voice of the public, those outside the policy-making elite, whether through scholarly publications, the press, or by dint of pressure groups, were accorded a significant amount of influence in Britain in the interwar years. An unwarranted emphasis was placed on the ability of public opinion, as a moral sanction, to influence the policy of the powers. Robert Cecil expressed an oft-repeated and widely held belief when he stated at the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission that

The last word is with the peoples of the world... .
They have the opportunity to carry forward the
disarmament of the world. What will they do with
it? The world can be disarmed if the people wish.²

All of these sentiments were admirably in keeping with the voices of dissent, particularly those within the Labour party. An ignorance of events in Germany and an idealism completely divorced from reality was typical of individuals such as George Lansbury, whom Robert

Vansittart rather unsympathetically depicts as "one of those first-class Christians who have so nearly wrecked Christian civilization."³ Ignorance of the nature of Nazism was unfortunately not alleviated after 1933 by the string of British dignitaries who made the trek to Berchtesgaden to visit the Führer.⁴ Seldom have the weaknesses of informal diplomacy been more apparent.

An effective British foreign policy was rendered impossible by the paucity of the armed forces. The army, derisively referred to as "The 'Cinderella' Service" by M. M. Postan,⁵ was hampered by the Ten Year Rule, financial stringency, and the minor rôle which was envisaged for it. The total home forces during the twenties seldom rose above four divisions, equipped with World War I weapons such as the Vickers machine gun which was designed in the 1880s. As late as 1936, 304 out of the 375 tanks which the army possessed were considered to be obsolete.

The strength of the navy was limited by the three naval conferences and by prohibitive costs. A two-power standard in relation to Europe and one-power standard in relation to the United States was successfully maintained for battleships, but the doctrine of "absolute needs" for auxiliary craft was voluntarily given up by Ramsay MacDonald in 1930. Although the traditional hegemony was not -- and could not have been -- maintained, the relative position of the navy was far better than that of the other services.

Until the late thirties, the R.A.F. suffered from inadequate technology and a misappraisal of the rôle of the air force in future conflicts. With the realisation after 1918 that the advantages of

insularity were gone, unnecessary emphasis was put on bombardment from the air. Both Rothermere and Baldwin are guilty on this count.⁶

Two major fallacies lie behind the unilateral reductions of the British. Before Keynesian theory was accepted, it was believed that sizable government spending, particularly on armaments, had an adverse effect on the economy. It was, in fact, thought that retrenchment was the essential pre-requisite to recovery. Secondly, it was held that armaments in themselves were the cause of war. Grey of Fallodon's assumption that "Great armaments lead inevitably to war... . The enormous growth of armaments in Europe...made war inevitable,"⁷ was widely accepted. Since armaments ensured war, it seemed natural to assume that disarmament would ensure peace. It was not realised that weapons in the hands of the pacific helped to preserve peace, or that arms could be the result of fear and insecurity rather than the cause. As Duff Cooper said to Mussolini, it was as ludicrous to say that armaments led to war as it was to say that umbrellas produced rain.⁸

The fact that the British services were neither effective deterrents nor fighting forces had very serious diplomatic consequences. As Hitler told Lord Halifax during the latter's visit to Germany in November 1937, experience shows that there is a direct correlation between the respect paid to a particular nation, and the extent of that nation's arms.⁹ Austen Chamberlain's words in the Commons during a discussion in June 1931 on the strength of Great Britain in comparison to that of France are founded on the same basic premise: "the less our strength, the more our policy depends upon

other nations and the less it is within our own control."¹⁰

Unfortunately, however, the makers of British foreign policy seemed to forget that power in the form of armaments is the ultimate determinant of policy in international relations.¹¹ The dilemma of the British at the Disarmament Conference centred around the fact that they -- and they alone -- had voluntarily disarmed before 1932. They therefore had no power basis from which to negotiate, and of course did not want to reach any sort of agreement which would crystallise their position of inferiority. This illustrates the fact that successful and lasting agreements have to be based on mutual self-interest and on the realities of the relative positions of the powers involved. Sir John Simon tersely sums up the British predicament in his memoirs, Retrospect:

You do not easily produce imitation in others by pointing to the fact that you have weakened yourself and would now like other people to do the same.¹²

The Germans, on the other hand, had a strong diplomatic position, based more on psychological advantages and potential strength than on existing armaments. They marshalled popular sympathy behind them by espousing the conviction that the Allies had failed to carry out their promises of 1919. They also, paradoxically enough, reaped diplomatic advantages from their lack of forces, since they were able to maintain that their lack of defences and consequent vulnerability showed that they had a greater need for security than did the over-armed French. Since it seemed logical to claim that there was no point in taking part in a conference if the results did not apply in

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF ALACHSA

a similar fashion to everyone, the Germans successfully obtained equality of status in December 1932. It was only a small step from this to equality of strength, from granting a concession in principle to allowing it to be carried out in actual fact. The progression was natural, if not inevitable, and the only question was whether it would be accomplished through unilateral action on the part of the Germans or through an international convention.

The ultimate aim of British policy was peace and the reconciliation of the great powers. Peace was essential for commerce and the well-being of a scattered and vulnerable empire. The problem of ensuring it was approached in several different ways. First of all, a policy of appeasement was followed. This involved getting Germany back into the 'Concert', and then satisfying her with various concessions. The word appeasement itself, it must be remembered, did not acquire derogatory connotations until after Munich. The problem with this policy, however, was that it just whet Germany's appetite. She saw the weaknesses of her antagonists, and skilfully kept raising her demands. Secondly, Britain tried to play the rôle of mediator in international relations, particularly between France and Germany. In practice, this often meant that Britain won the affection of neither power, was blamed by both for her lack of commitment, and was criticised by her own public for half-heartedness. Thirdly, since alliances were seen as being aimed against someone, and since it was thought that they were at the root of the Great War, attention was turned away from them towards much broader forms of combination such as the League of Nations. The 'old diplomacy' was replaced by the

ill-fated 'diplomacy by conference', which seemed to exacerbate differences rather than diminish them, and left the British holding the bag for sponsoring conferences which failed in the international limelight. The Disarmament Conference made issues out of non-issues, gave the Russians and Germans an excellent forum for propaganda, and increased antagonisms by stressing relative armament strengths. With the overt failure of the above, a fourth method was tried, collective security, "the security of the flock of sheep against the wolves."¹³ This, however, can only work when nations face equal risks, and come together in such a way that they can obtain equal advantages,¹⁴ a situation which arises very seldom in the subjective appraisals made by nations. The collective security approach was considered but not successfully implemented at the time of Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia.

The fundamental problem of the interwar years, the revision of the Treaty of Versailles, was never faced squarely in negotiations, either by conference or otherwise. It was inevitable that once Germany regained her strength she would try to change a system which was aimed against herself. It was similarly not surprising that the French would oppose any change. Alterations would in effect involve the surrender of their military preponderance, a contingency which could not be countenanced in view of their insecurity and realisation that because of Germany's superior war potential nominal equality with her would actually mean inferiority. Hitler had no illusions about the position of the French, flatly stating to his ministers that

The disarmament question will not be solved

at the conference table. There is no historical instance where a victor accorded arms to the vanquished through negotiations.¹⁵

The British, meanwhile, had a vague ideal of a community of equally disarmed states working in harmony towards European peace. As shown by his speech of 17 May 1933, Hitler was not going to rob the idealists -- at least through words -- of such pipe dreams.

What should have been done? First of all, a time limit should have been put on the various stipulations of Part V of the Peace Treaties. This would have removed some of the ambiguity from the situation, elucidating the illegality of German rearmament. Secondly, Allied disarmament should never have been allowed to become an issue in the first place. Specific political problems should have been handled before a disarmament conference was called. As it was, a united and consistent policy by the Allies towards Germany proved impossible as the latter managed to focus the attention of the British onto the French insistence on adequate security, an insistence which to the British smacked of distasteful power politics and suggested undesirable commitments. Certainly it is foolhardy to convene a public conference when basic differences have not been ironed out in advance. The Germans alone had nothing to lose and everything to gain. A successful conference would allow them to legally increase their arms, while one ending in failure would merely seem to reinforce their arguments about the hollowness of Allied promises. As it turned out, the Allies conveniently provided Hitler with his first ready-made victory in the international arena.

Disarmament is essentially a political rather than a technical

problem, since it involves a limitation of that freedom of action which constitutes the basic sovereignty of a nation. Disarmament can only be carried out when there is an equilibrium of interests based on a general acceptance of the status quo. The latter was supported for the most part only by France and her allies after the peace settlement, making agreement impossible. As a result, the Disarmament Conference, spanning the crucial years 1932 to 1934, was a failure, an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the interrelated problems of security and disarmament by multilateral negotiations.

FOOTNOTES FOR CONCLUSION

¹Quoted in Vansittart, p. 484. See also The History of The Times, p. 830.

²Doc. P.C., X, p. 408.

³Vansittart, p. 426.

⁴See Gilbert and Gott, chapter ii, "Hitler's Visitors."

⁵M. M. Postan, British War Production, vol. in History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Civil Series, ed. by W. K. Hancock, (London, 1952), p. 27.

⁶The above is covered in Postan, pp. 3-31.

⁷Viscount Grey, Twenty Five Years: 1892-1916, 2 vols, (New York, 1925), I, pp. 91-92.

⁸Cooper, p. 183.

⁹The Earl of Halifax, Fulness of Days, (London, 1957), p. 187.

¹⁰254 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1015.

¹¹Jordan, p. 160.

¹²Viscount Simon, Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Viscount Simon, (London, 1952), p. 185.

¹³A. E. M. C. Chatfield, Defence after the War, (London, 1944), p. 6.

¹⁴J. Schwoebel, L'Angleterre et la Sécurité Collective, (Paris, 1938), p. 420.

¹⁵D.G.F.P., 12 May, 1933, I, p. 410.

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